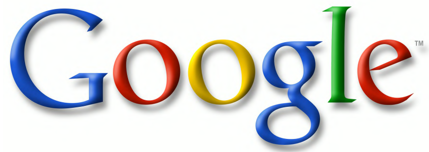

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A TREATISE

ON

THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH DETERMINE

THE

RATE OF WAGES

AND THE

CONDITION OF THE LABOURING CLASSES

INCLUDING

AN INQUIRY INTO THE INFLUENCE

OF

COMBINATIONS.

BY

J. R. MCULLOCH, ESQ.

Second Edition,

CORRECTED AND IMPROVED.

LONDON:

G. ROUTLEDGE & CO., FARRINGDON STREET.

1854.

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NOTICE.

We have attempted, in the following Treatise, to resolve the most important of all economic problems —that is, to trace and exhibit the circumstances which determine the rate of wages and the condition of the labouring classes. Our solution has been compressed within the narrowest limits, by stripping it of extraneous matter, and confining it to an elucidation of the leading principles on which it depends. But we are not aware that any inquiry of importance has been omitted, especially if it regard the labouring classes of the United Kingdom, to whom our investigations peculiarly refer. We are sanguine enough to believe that such of them as may peruse this little work will not regret having done so. Having been written with a sincere desire to contribute to their welfare, we have neither flattered any prejudice of theirs, nor concealed or slurred over any circumstance which might be supposed to be unfavourable to their views. There are none who are more deeply interested in having the truth, as respects their situation, honestly and fairly stated than the work-people. It will be seen that at bottom they have no exclusive interests, and

that their prosperity is intimately connected with, and is indeed inseparable from, the prosperity of the other classes. We have endeavoured to illustrate this connexion, and at the same time to show how much the well-being of the work-people depends on general principles, and how much on individual conduct. The importance of such inquiries ought to procure for them a corresponding degree of attention. And we would fain hope that they are here set in a pretty clear point of view; and are confident that they will be readily and easily followed by all who will give them something like the same consideration which they frequently bestow on subjects of very inferior importance.

Though principally intended for the use of the work-people, this work may also be of service to the masters. A knowledge of the circumstances which determine the rate of wages and the condition of the labouring classes is of as much importance to the employers as the employed. The more, indeed, that this knowledge is diffused, the more will the lasting and real interests of both classes be seen to correspond, and the fewer will be the chances of the peace and good order of society being disturbed by jealousies and disagreements between the masters and those in their service.

LONDON, *February*, 1854.

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PUBLICATIONS

BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS WORK.

In addition to this Treatise, Mr. M'Culloch has published the following Works, viz.—

1. A DICTIONARY, PRACTICAL, THEORETICAL, AND HISTORICAL, OF COMMERCE AND COMMERCIAL NAVIGATION. A new and improved Edition, in one very thick volume 8vo. Illustrated with Maps and Plans. London, 1854.

2. A DICTIONARY, GEOGRAPHICAL, STATISTICAL, AND HISTORICAL, of the various Countries, Places, and principal Natural Objects, in the World. A new and much improved Edition. 2 thick vols. 8vo. Illustrated with Maps. London, 1851.

3. A DESCRIPTIVE AND STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, exhibiting its Extent, Physical Capacities, Population, Industry, and Civil and Religious Institutions. Fourth Edition. 2 thick vols. 8vo. London, 1854.

4. SMITH'S WEALTH OF NATIONS; with a Life of the Author, Notes, and Supplemental Dissertations. New Edition. 1 vol. 8vo, double columns. London, 1850.

5. THE PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY; with some Inquiries respecting their Application, and a Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Science. Fourth and amended Edition. 1 vol. 8vo. Edinburgh, 1849.

6. A TREATISE ON THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF TAXATION AND THE FUNDING SYSTEM. The Second Edition, enlarged and improved. 1 vol. 8vo. London, 1852.

7. THE LITERATURE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY: a Classified Catalogue of Select Publications in the different Departments of that Science, with Historical, Critical, and Biographical Notices. 1 vol. 8vo. London, 1845.

8. A TREATISE ON THE SUCCESSION OF PROPERTY VACANT BY DEATH; including Inquiries into the Influence of Primogeniture, Entail, Compulsory Partitions, Foundations, &c., over the Public Interest. 1 vol. 8vo. London, 1848.

9. TREATISES AND ESSAYS ON SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH ECONOMICAL POLICY AND THE HISTORY OF COMMERCE, with Biographical Sketches of Quesnay, Adam Smith, and Ricardo. 1 vol. 8vo. Edinburgh, 1853.

ON THE

CIRCUMSTANCES

WHICH DETERMINE

THE RATE OF WAGES.

WAGES constitute the reward or compensation paid to labourers by those who employ them, in return for their services.

Taken in its widest sense, the term labourers is very comprehensive. In addition to the myriads who are engaged in agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing pursuits, it comprises all sorts of public functionaries, from the prime minister downwards, with those who crowd the ranks of what are called the learned and liberal professions. These parties, how widely soever they may differ in everything else, agree in this, that they exchange their services for valuable considerations of one sort or other. Their entire subsistence, in so far at least as they depend on their employment, is derived from wages; and they are as evidently labourers as if they handled a shuttle or a spade, or held a plough. Even those to whom ample fortunes have descended are not exempted from the necessity of exertion. The duties and obligations which property brings along with it are not a little onerous. The judicious management of a large estate, or other property, requires much care and circumspection. Without this, it may probably be wasted or dissipated; and, at all events, it cannot be applied

to its legitimate ends, of advancing the interests and the honour of its possessors, and the well-being of their tenants, dependants, and neighbours. Though the contrary be sometimes affirmed, the rich have little in common with the gods of Epicurus. Idleness is hardly less injurious to them than to the poor. Notwithstanding the influence which justly belongs to rank and wealth, every one is aware that "It is the hand of the diligent which bears rule." We may therefore say with Paley, that "Every man has his work. The kind of work varies, and that is all the difference there is. A great deal of labour exists beside that of the hands; many species of industry beside bodily operation, requiring equal assiduity, more attention, more anxiety. It is not true, therefore, that men of elevated stations are exempted from work; it is only true that there is assigned to them work of a different kind; whether more easy or more pleasant may be questioned; but certainly not less wanted, not less essential to the common good."[1]

In the following treatise the term labourers is taken in its popular and more confined sense. Our investigations refer to the wages of those only who labour with the hand, as contradistinguished from those who labour with the head. Manual labourers form, however, by far the most numerous class in all nations, and though ranking lower in public estimation than the others, their functions are of paramount importance. Our fleets and armies depend on them for recruits; their expenditure furnishes the largest portion of the public revenue; and their industry and ingenuity supply most part of the conveniences and enjoyments which raise civilized man above the savage. An inquiry into the circumstances which determine the wages and condition of those to whom the other classes are so deeply indebted, and who, at the same time, form so large a portion of all societies, must possess a superior degree of interest. It has much more of a practical than of a theoretical character. The vast majority of the labouring classes are very imperfectly informed with respect to the circumstances in question. And yet it will be seen that these are

[1] Works, v. 98. Ed. 1819.

powerfully influenced by, and indeed in great measure depend on, themselves. A knowledge of their nature and operation is, therefore, of all things that which is most indispensable to their well-being, and to that of the communities of which they form so large a portion. Till it be acquired and acted upon they cannot help forming unreasonable and unfounded conclusions in regard to many important points in the conduct of life; sometimes doing that from which they ought most carefully to abstain, and at other times leaving undone that which they ought resolutely to set about; neglecting the good that is dependent on themselves, and within their command, for what is dependent on others, contingent, and generally unattainable: suffering themselves to be deceived and misled by impostors pretending to be their friends; and ascribing those unfavourable results to defective laws and institutions, and the proceedings of hostile parties, for which they are themselves solely and certainly responsible.

Like everything else which is bought and sold, the labour or service of man may vary in its price. Those who at one time exchange the labour of a day, a week, a month, or other period, for a given sum of money, or a given quantity of necessaries and conveniences, may, at another time, exchange it for a different sum or quantity. Our first object will therefore be, to appreciate the circumstances on which these fluctuations depend, and the limits within which they are confined.

CHAPTER I.

Wages depend on the Magnitude of the Capital or Fund appropriated to their payment, compared with the number of Labourers.

THE different articles or products belonging to a country that either are or may be employed to support its inhabitants, or to facilitate production, have been termed its capital. It conse-

quently comprises, in advanced countries like England, an all but infinite variety of articles, including buildings, ships and machinery of all sorts, the lower animals in a state of domestication, with food, clothes, &c. But it is unnecessary, in an inquiry of this sort, to refer to capital in general; for we have only to deal with that portion of it which embraces the various articles intended for "the use and accommodation of the labouring class." This portion forms the fund out of which their wages are wholly paid. We should err if we supposed that the capacity of a country to feed and employ labourers, is to be measured by the advantageousness of its situation, the richness of its soil, or the extent of its territory. These, undoubtedly, are circumstances of very great importance, and have a powerful influence in determining the rate at which a people advance, or may advance, in numbers and civilization. But it is obviously not by them, but by the amount of the capital applicable to the payment of wages belonging to a country, that its power of supporting and employing labourers is to be measured. Holland is less fertile than Poland or Hungary, and Lancashire is less fertile than Kent; but, owing to their greater command of capital, the population of the former is comparatively dense. A fertile soil may be made a means of rapidly increasing capital; but that is all. Before it can be cultivated capital must be provided for the support of the labourers employed upon it, in like manner as it must be provided for the support of those engaged in manufactures, or other branches of industry.

It is a necessary consequence of what is now stated, that the average amount of subsistence falling to each labourer, or the rate of wages, wholly depends on the proportion between capital and population. On the one hand is a quantity of necessaries and conveniences, and, on the other, the work-people among whom they are to be divided. If, therefore, the amount of the former be increased, without an equal increase taking place in the number of the latter, the share of each, or his wages, will be increased; while, if the number of work-people be increased more than the mass of necessaries and conveniences

to be distributed amongst them, each will get a smaller share, or a reduced rate of wages.

This principle is so very plain as hardly to require or admit of illustration. Suppose, however, that a country with *two* millions of labourers, has a capital of £30,000,000 sterling, annually appropriated to the payment of wages, it is evident that the wages of each, reducing them all to the same common standard, will be £15; and it is further evident that no addition can be made to this rate unless capital be increased in a greater degree than the number of labourers, or the number of labourers be diminished in a greater degree than the amount of capital. Now this case is not peculiar to this or that country, but is of universal application. Labourers are everywhere the divisor, capital the dividend. And hence the fundamental principle that there are no means by which wages can be raised, other than by accelerating the increase of capital as compared with population, or by retarding the increase of population as compared with capital. And every scheme for raising wages, which is not bottomed on this principle, or which has not an increase of the ratio of capital to population for its object, must be completely nugatory and ineffectual.

Wages being most commonly paid and estimated in money, it may perhaps be thought that their amount will, in consequence, depend more on the supply of money in circulation, than on the magnitude of capital. But a little reflection will serve to show that the amount of money paid to the labourers is immaterial. They always receive such a sum as is equivalent to the portion of the national capital falling to their share. Men do not live on coin or paper. Work people carry the money paid to them direct to the retail dealers, and expend it on necessaries and conveniences. And it is by the amount of these which comes into their possession that their wages are really to be measured. Were the money in Great Britain suddenly doubled, wages in no long time would also be doubled. But if no corresponding change took place

in the supplies of food, clothes, and such like articles, their price would equally rise, and the condition of the labourers be precisely the same as before. They would carry twice the number of sovereigns and shillings to market that they did previously to the increase in the quantity of money; but these would obtain for them only the same quantity of commodities.

Whatever, therefore, may be the state of money wages—whether they are 2s., 3s., or 5s. a-day—if the capital applicable to the payment of wages and the population continue the same, or increase or diminish in the same proportion, no real variation will take place in the rate of wages. Wages do not really rise, except when the proportion of capital to population is enlarged; and they do not really fall, except when that proportion is diminished.

But, though the principle now stated admit of no dispute, several unfounded inferences have been deduced from it. And, to prevent misconception, it may be right to state at the outset, that the condition or well-being of the labouring classes cannot in any case be correctly measured by, or inferred from, the wages they receive. It depends to a great extent on their conduct and habits, more especially on the description and cost of the articles used by them, and on their frugality and forethought. The same amount of wages that would suffice to maintain a workman who lived principally on corn and butcher's-meat, would probably maintain two or more if they lived principally on potatoes. And, whatever may be the articles of subsistence used by a people, they will, it is obvious, be powerfully affected by variations in their supply and price,[1] by the skill with which they are applied to their respective purposes, and the economy with which they are used or saved for future occasions. The expenditure even of the poorest individuals is spread, in a country like this, over a great variety of articles, some of which conduce but little,

[1] A rise in their price being in most cases nearly equivalent to a corresponding fall of wages, and a fall in their price to a corresponding rise of wages.

while others are not unfrequently adverse, to their comfort and respectability. And, therefore, though the rate of wages, whether estimated in money or in commodities, depends on the proportion between capital and labour, the condition of the labourers is not determined by that rate only, bnt partly by it, and partly also, and perhaps principally, by the mode in which they expend their wages, that is, by their peculiar tastes and habits in regard to necessaries, conveniences, and amusements. Every one, indeed, is aware that work-people with 18s., 20s., and 24s. a-week, are frequently much better off than others with 28s., 30s., and 36s., per do., though the families of the former be quite as large as those of the latter.

The wages and the habits of the labouring classes are intimately connected with, and powerfully influence, each other. Generally speaking, a rise of wages, however occasioned, tends, as will be afterwards shown, to improve the habits of the population; and improved habits tend equally to raise wages; whereas a fall of wages and the deterioration of habits which it occasions, have precisely opposite effects.

Without further insisting at present on considerations which will hereafter be resumed, it is obvious that the rate of wages in all countries and at all periods, depends on the ratio between the portion of their capital appropriated to the payment of wages, and the number of their labourers. The next object, in the natural order of inquiry, is to discover whether capital and population usually increase or diminish in the same or in different proportions. This is obviously a very important inquiry. If capital have a tendency to advance faster than population, then it is plain that wages will have an equal tendency to increase, and the condition of the labouring classes will, speaking generally, become more and more prosperous. But, on the other hand, if population have a tendency to increase faster than capital, it is equally plain, unless this tendency be checked by the prudence and forethought of the labourers, that wages will have a constant

tendency to fall; and that consequently, the condition of the lower classes may be expected to become gradually more and more wretched, until their wages are reduced to the smallest pittance that will suffice for their support. It is indispensable that principles, pregnant with such important results, should be carefully investigated.

CHAPTER II.

Comparative Increase of Capital and Population—Epidemics—Emigration.

It is not possible to obtain any accurate estimates of the quantities of capital in countries at different periods; but the capacity of that capital to feed and employ labourers, and the rate of its increase, may, notwithstanding, be learned with sufficient accuracy for our purpose, by referring to the progress of population, and the habits of the bulk of the people. The statements already made show that the inhabitants of a country, supposing them to have the same, or about the same, continuous command over necessaries and conveniences, cannot increase without a corresponding increase of capital. Whenever, therefore, we find the people of a country increasing, without any, or with but little variation taking place in their condition, we may conclude that its capital is increasing in the same, or nearly the same, proportion. Now, it has been established beyond all question, that the population of some of the States of North America, after making due allowance for immigrants, has continued to double, for a century past, in so short a period as twenty or at most five and twenty years. And as the command over necessaries and conveniences exercised by the inhabitants of the United States, has not certainly been diminished during the last century, the increase of population shows that their capital has ad-

vanced in a corresponding ratio. But in old-settled countries, the increase of capital, and consequently of population, is much slower. The population of Scotland, for example, is supposed to have amounted to 1,265,000 in 1755; and as it amounted to 2,870,784 in 1851, it would follow, on the principle already stated, that the capital of the country had required nearly 76 years to double.[1] In like manner, the population of England and Wales amounted to 6,039,000 in 1750, and to 17,905,831 in 1851, showing that the population, and therefore the capital, of the country, applicable to the support of man, or the supply of food, clothes, and other articles necessary for his subsistence, had about trebled in a century.

The cause of this discrepancy in the rates at which capital and population increase in different countries, is to be found in the circumstance of industry being more productive in some than in others. Capital consists of the accumulated products of industry; and wherever, therefore, industry is most productive, there also, it may be presumed, will be the greatest power to increase capital. This presumption may no doubt be, and frequently is, defeated by the greater weight of the public burdens in the more productive country, by defective institutions, a feeling of insecurity, or some such modifying principle. But where these do not occur, or where their influence is not sufficient to countervail the superior productiveness of industry, the means of accumulation will be comparatively extensive. It is obvious, too, that the increase of that portion of capital which consists of the food and other raw products required for the subsistence and accommodation of society, will especially depend on the productiveness of the soils which are under tillage. Were agriculture equally advanced in any two countries, and the soils under cultivation twice as fertile in one of them as in the other, it is evident that the power of adding to its stock of food and other raw materials would also be twice as great in the more fertile country as in the less fertile.

[1] It has more than doubled; for the condition of all classes has been greatly improved.

It is on this principle partly, but more on the facility of getting land, that we are able to account for the rapid increase of capital and population in the United States, and generally in all colonies planted in fertile and thinly-peopled countries. America possesses a vast extent of fertile and unoccupied territory, which is sold in convenient portions at very low prices. It is not good land, but labour, that is there the desideratum; and the larger a man's family, that is, the greater the amount of labour at his command, the more prosperous does he become. Hence, in America, while farming is low, profits are high. But in Great Britain, and other long-settled and densely peopled countries, the state of society is widely different. Here farming is high and profits low. All our land has been appropriated for ages; large sums have been expended upon its improvement; and it cannot be obtained except at a high price. Additional supplies of food are in consequence raised with much greater difficulty in old than in newly settled countries. And, *cæteris paribus*, their advance in wealth and population is comparatively slow. The rate of wages in such countries may not, all things taken into account, differ very materially. But the situation of the labourers in new countries is, notwithstanding, generally preferable, inasmuch as they afford greater facilities to industrious individuals of acquiring land, and raising themselves to a superior station.

It was stated by various witnesses before a committee of the House of Commons on the state of agriculture, in 1822, that the produce obtained from the best lands under wheat in England and Wales varied from thirty-six to forty bushels an acre;[1] while that obtained from the inferior lands did not exceed eight or ten bushels. But in past times, when the population was scanty, and tillage was confined to the superior lands, agriculture was at a very low ebb; and it may be doubted whether the lands which now yield from forty to fifty bushels an acre did then yield more than ten or twelve bushels. The power to increase supplies of food is not, there-

[1] From forty to fifty bushels an acre would now be nearer the mark.

fore, dependent alone on the quality of the soils in cultivation, but partly on that and partly also on the state of agriculture. In Britain, improvements in the latter have more than countervailed for a lengthened period the decreasing fertility of the soils to which we have had to resort for additional supplies of food. This has been most strikingly verified, as every one knows, in the interval that has elapsed since the conclusion of the American, and more especially of the late French, war. We now raise much larger supplies of corn, beef, &c., than we did at the last mentioned period, notwithstanding prices have fallen heavily in the interval.

In England and the United States, the inhabitants of which speak the same language, and have a very extensive intercourse with each other, the arts and sciences may be expected to approach near to an equality. And therefore, if the poorest lands in cultivation in America, were twice as fertile as the poorest lands in cultivation in England, it might be supposed that agricultural industry in the former would be about twice as productive as in the latter, and that the power which each country possesses of furnishing supplies of food, and other farm produce, would be in about that proportion.

It is found, however, that theoretical conclusions of this sort are much modified in practice. Agricultural science may be equal, or nearly equal, in two countries, and yet their agriculture may be widely different. Scientific knowledge, which is generally confined to a few, and the application of that knowledge by the parties engaged in any great department of industry, are totally different things. The former may be in a very advanced state, while the latter may be in its infancy. And such is the case with agricultural science and practice in the United States. The theory of agriculture is there highly advanced, while, speaking generally, the art is imperfect in the extreme. This is a consequence of the facility enjoyed by the Americans of acquiring new land, and of its being more advantageous to cultivate it in the cheapest manner, than to apply improved processes to the old lands. Hence it is that

extensive tracts of the latter, after having been cultivated for a while, have been abandoned; and that, except in a few peculiarly favoured districts, the crops are not nearly so heavy as might have been anticipated. This state of things will, of course, change with the changing circumstances of the country. As it becomes more difficult to obtain supplies of new land, a better and more careful system of tillage will be applied to the old land.

Still, however, there can be no doubt that, partly from the farmers being the owners of the land which they cultivate, partly from their not being obliged to resort to inferior soils, and partly from their exemption from tithes, and the smaller amount of their burdens, industry is decidedly more productive in countries like the United States, and generally in those that are newly settled, than in those that have been long occupied by a comparatively dense population. But in America, as elsewhere, the best lands will, in the long run, be exhausted; and wherever this is the case, increased supplies of food can only be had by resorting to such as are less fertile. This decreasing fertility of the soil may, as we have just seen, be countervailed, or more than countervailed, by improvements in agriculture and the arts. But whether this be so or not, were population as dense, and tillage as far extended over secondary lands, in the United States as in England, the probability is, that industry would be no better rewarded there than here, and that the progress of both countries in wealth and population would not be very different.

The free importation of corn and other articles of food has, however, a considerable influence over these results. It is true that prices in a country which habitually imports a portion of her supplies, must be higher than in the countries from which she imports; and she is thus laid under the same sort of disadvantage, as compared with them, as if she cultivated soils of a less degree of fertility. But with the freedom of the corn trade, this advantage on the one side and disadvantage on the other, is not very material. And while the vast variety of markets to which an importing country like England

may resort, affords the best attainable security against the disastrous influence of scarcities, it reduces her ordinary prices to about the average level of those of the commercial world.

But whether with or without a free commercial system, still it is plain that the power of this and of all countries to feed and maintain additional inhabitants must be progressively diminished, through the limited extent, and, perhaps, also the diminished fertility of the soils, from which they must directly or indirectly derive their supplies of food. On the other hand, however, the power possessed by the inhabitants of the most densely peopled countries of adding to their numbers, undergoes no sensible change. The principle, or instinct, which impels man to propagate his species, has appeared in all ages and countries so nearly the same, that it may, in the language of mathematicians, be considered as a *constant quantity*. However rapidly the means of subsistence have occasionally been increasing, population has seldom failed to keep pace with them. Those who inquire into the past and present state of the world, will find that the population of all countries is generally accommodated to their means of subsistence. When these are increased, population is also increased, or is better provided for; and when they are diminished, the population is either worse provided for, or it falls off, or both.

We have seen that the population of the United States doubles itself in so short a period as twenty or five-and-twenty years. And if the supplies of food and other articles required for the support of the people continue to increase as fast as they have done, population will most likely continue to advance in the same proportion for a lengthened period; or, it may be, until the space required to carry on the operations of industry becomes deficient. But the principle of increase is quite as strong in Yorkshire, Holland, and Normandy, as it is in Kentucky and Illinois, and yet it is plainly impossible that the population of England, the Netherlands, and France, can be doubled in so short a period. While the

Americans have millions upon millions of acres of rich unoccupied land, over which to extend cultivation, we have not even a single acre in that predicament; and owing to the greater outlay upon the lands we are compelled to cultivate, and the greater weight of our tithes, poor-rates, and other taxes, the quantity of produce to be divided between the undertakers of work in England and their labourers is less than in America, so that both parties have a less power of providing for the wants of a family. A number of children is not here, as in the United States or Australia, a source of wealth. On the contrary, their maintenance occasions an expense, which the poor man, unless he be at once frugal and industrious, can with difficulty meet. The habits of the people have been moulded accordingly. There is a general feeling that it would be imprudent to enter into matrimonial connexions without having something like a reasonable prospect of being able to maintain the children that may be expected to spring from them. And marriages are, in consequence, very generally deferred to a later period than in America, and a greater proportion of our people find it expedient to pass their lives in a state of celibacy. And it is fortunate that this is the case; that their good sense, and their laudable desire to preserve their place in society, make them control their passions, and subject them to prudential considerations. Man cannot possibly increase beyond the means provided for his support. And were the tendency of population to increase in densely peopled countries, where the difficulty of providing supplies of food is comparatively great, not checked by the prevalence of moral restraint, or the forethought of the people, it would be checked by the prevalence of want, misery, and famine. There is no alternative. The population of every country has the power, supposing food to be adequately supplied, to go on doubling every five and twenty years. But as the limited extent, and limited fertility of the soil, render it impossible to go on producing food in this ratio, it necessarily follows, unless the passions are moderated, and a proportional check given to the

increase of population, that the standard of human subsistence will be reduced to the lowest assignable limit, and that famine and pestilence will be perpetually at work to relieve the population of wretches born only to be starved.

Mr. Malthus was probably the first who conclusively showed that, speaking generally, the tendency of population is not merely to keep on a level with the means of subsistence, but to exceed them; and the object of his "Essay on the Principles of Population," is to illustrate this principle, by pointing out the pernicious consequences resulting from a redundant population, improvident unions, and the bringing of human beings into the world without being able to provide for their subsistence and education. And instead of this doctrine being, as has been often stated, unfavourable to human happiness, a material change for the better would undoubtedly be effected in the condition of society, were its justice generally acknowledged, and a vigorous effort made to give it a practical bearing and real influence. It is evident, on the least reflection, that poverty is the source of the greater portion of the ills which afflict humanity; and there can be no manner of doubt, that a too great increase of population, by occasioning a redundant supply of labour, an excessive competition for employment, and low wages, is the most efficient cause of poverty. It is now too late to contend that a crowded population is a sure sympton of national prosperity. The population of the United States is not nearly so dense as that of Ireland; but will any one say that they are less flourishing and happy? The truth is, that the prosperity of a nation depends but little on the number of its inhabitants, but much on their industry, their intelligence, and their command over necessaries and conveniences. The earth affords room only, with the existing means of production, for a certain number of human beings to be trained to any degree of perfection. And "every real philanthropist would rather witness the existence of a thousand such beings, than that of

a million of millions of creatures, pressing against the limits of subsistence, burdensome to themselves, and contemptible to each other." Wherever the labouring classes continue to increase more rapidly than the fund which has to support and employ them, their wages are gradually reduced till they reach the lowest possible limit. When placed under such unfortunate circumstances, they are cut off from all expectation of rising in the world, or of improving their condition. Their exertions are neither inspired by hope nor by ambition. Unable to save, or to acquire a stake in society, they have no inducement to make any unusual exertions. They consequently become indolent and dispirited; and, if not pressed by hunger would be always idle.

It is thus apparent that the ratio which the progress of capital bears to the progress of population, is the pivot on which the comfort and well-being of the great bulk of society must always turn. If capital, as compared with population, be increased, the population will be better provided for; if it continue the same, the condition of the population will undergo no change; and if it be diminished, that condition will be changed for the worse.

The principles thus briefly elucidated render it apparent, on a little reflection, that the condition of the bulk of every people must usually depend much more on their own conduct than on that of their rulers. Not that we mean to insinuate that the influence of governments over their subjects is not great and powerful, or that the latter should not be governed in the best possible manner. A people who have the misfortune to be subjected to arbitrary and intolerant rulers, though otherwise possessed of all the powers and capacities necessary for the production of wealth, will, from the want of security and freedom, be most probably sunk in poverty and wretchedness. But wherever property is secure, industry free, and the public burdens moderate, the happiness or misery of the labouring classes depends almost wholly on themselves. Government has there done for them all that it

should, and all in truth that it can do. It has given them security and freedom. But the use or abuse of these inestimable advantages is their own affair. They may be either provident or improvident, industrious or idle; and being free to choose, they are alone responsible for the consequences of their choice.

It is indeed foolish to expect, as some theorists have done, that the progress of population should ever be exactly adjusted to the increase or diminution of national capital, or that the conduct of the mass of any people should be perceptibly influenced by public and remote considerations. The theories of philosophers, and the measures of statesmen and legislators, have reference to the interests and well-being of nations; but those of ordinary men embrace a comparatively narrow range. Their views seldom, indeed, extend even to the class to which they belong. They include only themselves, their families, and near connexions; and they are satisfied if they succeed in promoting their interests, without thinking or caring about those of others. Luckily, however, the two coincide. The industry, the frugality, and the forethought, without which no individual can either hope to improve his condition if he have little or nothing, or to keep his own, and avoid falling a sacrifice to poverty, if he have anything, are virtues indispensable to the well-being of individuals, and consequently of the community. And it is so ordered, that no sort of combination or co-operation is required to secure these advantages. They are realized in the fullest extent by every one by whom they are practised; and they can be realized by none else.

It is fortunate that those principles, a knowledge of which is of most importance to the interests of mankind, lie on the surface, and are easily understood, and may be practised by all. Every man, if he have any reflection, who proposes entering into a matrimonial engagement, must feel that he is about to undertake a serious responsibility. The wages or resources which may be able to support himself comfortably, may be insufficient for the support of two, or three, or four

individuals. And if he have no provision made beforehand, and cannot increase his means by greater economy or greater exertion, what can he expect from his marriage but that he should be reduced to comparative poverty, and be forced, perhaps, to take refuge in a workhouse? There is no denying this conclusion; and a conviction of its truth will not tend to obstruct any really desirable union. It will only tend to lessen the number of those that are improvidently made, and which seldom fail to be ruinous alike to the parties and the public.

It is not unusual, indeed, for those who have brought themselves into difficulties by their improvidence or misconduct, to throw the blame on the government or the institutions of the country in which they live. But a pretence of this sort cannot impose on any one possessed of the smallest discernment. It is the merest delusion to imagine that it is in the power of any administration to protect those from suffering and degradation who do not exercise a reasonable degree of industry and forethought. And though it were in its power, its interference in their behalf would be inconsistent with the most obvious dictates of justice and common sense. The lazy, the unskilful, and the improvident workman, whether he belong to Australia or China, England or Russia, will always be poor and miserable. No man can devolve on government, or on others, any portion of that self-responsibility which at once dignifies and constitutes an essential part of human nature. They are not the friends, but the worst enemies of the poor, who seek to conceal or disguise this great truth; and who endeavour to make it be believed that it is possible, by dint of legislation, to provide for the welfare of those who will not use the means which Providence has given them of maintaining themselves in their present position, or of rising to a higher. Such persons are to the poor what a treacherous guide is to a traveller in a strange country. They lead them from the only path that can conduct to comfort and respectability, to one which is sure to terminate in disappointment and disgrace.

It will, we presume, be universally admitted, that practically it is impossible to increase the supplies of food and other articles necessary for the support of a family, so rapidly in Great Britain and France as they may be, and in fact are, increased in the United States and Australia. But how can those who admit this proposition deny its inevitable consequence, that were our people to marry as early and universally as the Americans and Australians, we should have, first a great increase of poverty, and then of mortality? Capital, indeed, or the means of supporting and employing labour, will, supposing other things to be equal, increase most under a just and liberal government. But experience sufficiently proves, that the power which men possess of increasing their numbers, is sufficiently strong to make population keep pace with the progress of capital, in nations possessed of boundless tracts of fertile and unoccupied land, and of the most liberal institutions. And as this power does not fluctuate with the fluctuating circumstances of society, but remains constant, it evidently follows, if it be not controlled by their good sense and prudence, that it will necessarily in the end sink the inhabitants of densely-peopled countries into the most abject poverty.

The influence of the different rates at which capital and population increase in different countries over the condition of their inhabitants, may be set in a striking light by referring to the instances of Ireland and Great Britain. No one doubts that the capital of the former increased considerably during the last fifty or a hundred years, though, when we compare the slow growth of towns and manufactures, the fewness of public works, and the scanty improvements effected in Ireland, during that period, with the comparatively rapid growth of towns and manufactures, and the prodigious extension of all sorts of improvements in Great Britain, it is apparent that the increase of capital must have been, at least, some four or five times as great in the interval referred to in this as in the sister kingdom. But by one of those curious

contradictions which so frequently occur in human affairs, the inhabitants of the two countries increased previously to 1845 inversely as the increase of their capitals, that is, they increased most rapidly where the means of subsistence increased least rapidly. Thus it appears that while the population of Great Britain, which amounted to about 7,000,000 in 1740, had risen to above 18,000,000 in 1840, being an increase in the interval of rather more than 255 per cent, the population of Ireland, which amounted to about 2,000,000 in 1740, had risen to above 8,000,000 in 1840, being an increase of no less than 400 per cent., or of 145 per cent. more than in Britain, notwithstanding the vastly greater increase of capital in the latter!

We need not stop to inquire into the causes[1] which led to this extraordinary disparity in the increase of population in the two great divisions of the empire, compared with the increase of their capitals. Whatever they may have been, it is obvious that its excessive augmentation in Ireland was the immediate cause of the want of demand for the labour of the Irish people, and of their abject poverty. Had population increased less rapidly, fewer individuals would have been seeking for employment, their wages would consequently have been higher, and their situation so far improved. And such being the cause of the evil, it is plain, had it not been obviated or mitigated, and the numbers of the Irish people rendered more commensurate with the funds for their support, that their wages would not have been increased, or their condition sensibly changed for the better. It is obvious, too, that any people whose numbers continue for any very considerable period to increase faster than the means of providing for their comfortable subsistence, must eventually sink to the same low condition as the people of Ireland. And this increase can hardly fail to take place in those old settled countries in which the standard of living is not sufficiently elevated, or in which the principle of augmentation is not

[1] See these causes specified in the Statistical account of the British Empire. Vol. i. pp. 438-445.

powerfully countervailed by the operation of moral restraint, or of a proper degree of prudence and forethought in the formation of matrimonial engagements.

It is plain from these statements, that any circumstance or combination of circumstances which may happen to diminish the population of a country, without, at the same time, diminishing its capital, or its means of supporting and employing people, would in so far improve the condition of the remaining portion. And hence it is that nations, which have been exposed to the ravages of famine or epidemical disease, how intense soever their sufferings in the mean time, speedily recover from their influence, and are not unfrequently rendered more prosperous and flourishing than ever. The history of England furnishes numerous instances of the truth of this statement. In 1349 the kingdom was afflicted with a dreadful pestilence, which is believed to have carried off a full third part of the inhabitants. And yet this tremendous visitation contributed more perhaps than anything else to raise the peasantry from the state of degradation into which they were previously sunk, and to inspire them with just ideas of their importance. The scarcity of labourers occasioned an immediate rise of wages; and this having been loudly complained of by the gentry and other employers, parliament was prevailed upon to pass an act imposing heavy penalties on such labourers as refused to serve at the same rate of wages which they had received previously to the pestilence.[1] But this statute proved to be as inefficient as it was unjust. Though repeatedly renewed, it is admitted on all hands to have had little or no influence in preventing or retarding the rise of wages. And the pestilence in the reign of Edward III. is the æra of the first great improvement in the physical and moral condition of the people of England. (Eden. on the Poor, i. 31, &c.)

It is on this same principle, or on the diminution of the inhabitants of a country without a corresponding diminution of its wealth, that the advantage of emigration is principally de-

[1] See *post*, chap. vii. on Combinations.

pendant. But in emigration the advantage is free from any alloy; for it not only benefits those whom the emigrants leave behind, but also the emigrants themselves. The labour of the former is in greater demand, and their wages are increased through the diminution of their numbers, while the condition of the latter is wholly changed. They pass at once from over-peopled to under-peopled countries; there is a keen competition for their services; their wages are two, three, or four times, perhaps, what they were in the country which they left; a large family, instead of being a burden, is a source of wealth; and such as are prudent and economical, in no long time, become thriving landowners or substantial tradesmen.

During the last seven years Ireland has been subjected to the joint influence of a scarcity and a very extensive emigration. The ravages of famine and disease, occasioned by the potato rot of 1845-46 and 1846-47, combined with the efforts of many landlords to clear their estates, and with the flight of the peasantry to this country and the United States, had such an effect upon the population, that it fell off, between 1845 and 1851, from above 8,000,000 to 6,515,794! And as the emigration to America has continued down to the present time, it is probable that the population is now (1853) rather below than above 6,000,000. At present it is impossible to foresee or estimate the various consequences of the severe ordeal through which Ireland has thus recently passed; but enough has already transpired to satisfy every one that this is a case in which the benevolent wisdom of Providence will educe real good out of apparent evil. The condition of the Irish peasantry, though still very much depressed, has been signally improved. The dependence which they appear to be yet inclined to place, notwithstanding its many recent failures, on so precarious and worthless a resource as the potato, is, no doubt, a very unfavourable symptom. But we would fain hope that, in this respect, they will become more alive to their real interests: and there is good reason to think that the experience which the landlords have had of the ruinous consequences of the continued subdivision of the land, combined with the influence of the compulsory provision for the support of the

poor, will prevent the population from again increasing with anything like the rapidity with which it increased from 1770 down to 1840.

The paramount importance of the increase of population being subordinate to that of capital, being thus evident, it may be inquired whether government may not assist in bringing about this result? But how desirable soever, this is a matter in which legislation can do comparatively little. Where government has secured the property and the rights of individuals, and has given that freedom to industry which is essential, it has done nearly all it can do to promote the increase of capital. If it interfere in industrious undertakings, its proceedings will be productive only of injury. The reliance of individuals on their own efforts, and their desire to advance themselves, are the only principles on which any dependence can be safely placed. When government engages in any department of industry it is obliged, inasmuch as it has no means of its own, to obtain the necessary funds from its subjects, either by loans or taxes. It is obvious, therefore, that its interference adds nothing to the capital of the country. At best it merely substitutes one sort of superintendence for another: a salaried officer, with but little, if any interest in the success of the undertaking, for the unwearied vigilance of an individual trading on his own account, and dependent, perhaps, for his subsistence on the issue of his labours. To suppose that undertakings carried on by such different agencies should be equally prosperous, is to suppose what is evidently contradictory. This is a matter in regard to which there is no longer any difference of opinion. It is now universally acknowledged, that every branch of industry that may be carried on by private parties, will be more successfully and economically prosecuted by them than by the servants of government; and that any advantage that may seem to arise in any particular case, from employing the latter, will be found on examination to be altogether illusory. By interfering in production government is sure, in so far as the influence of its measures extend, to weaken the industry and enterprise of

its subjects, occasioning at one and the same time a misapplication and waste of capital, and a diminution of its produce.

It is nugatory, therefore, to expect any advantageous results from the efforts of government directly to increase capital or the demand of labour. It may, however, promote its increase indirectly, by relieving industry from oppressive burdens and shackles, negotiating with foreign powers for the removal of impediments to trade, and endeavouring, in short, to give greater facilities to production. But beyond this, the presumption is, that its interference will be productive of mischief rather than of good. And, if it attempt to set up national workshops for the employment of the poor, it will increase the poverty it seeks to relieve, disturb all the usual channels of industry, and become a potent instrument of evil.

It may, perhaps, be asked, though government be thus incapable of contributing to increase wages by increasing capital, may it not effect the same end by promoting emigration, and relieving the market of the surplus hands thrown upon it? This question should, we think, be answered in the affirmative. An extensive voluntary emigration has been going on for a lengthened period from Great Britain to which, as everybody knows, an extraordinary stimulus has been given by the discovery of the gold fields in California and Australia. And no one can doubt that this emigration has been signally advantageous not only to the emigrants themselves, but to all classes of the community. Wages have been raised, and the condition of the labourers materially improved. And at the same time that this has been done, the shipping interest has been enriched by the demand for vessels to carry away the emigrants; and a new and rapidly increasing demand has been created for all sorts of manufactured products. Hence the unprecedented increase of manufactures, commerce, and shipping; and the unexampled success that has latterly attended most sorts of industrial undertakings.

But in ordinary times, and in some degree even at present, voluntary emigrants do not always consist of those that might

be most advantageously spared. They are in most cases active, enterprising, and industrious; and sometimes their emigration rather serves to make room for an inferior class, than to improve the condition of the labouring class in general. The poorest classes, however desirous they may be, are unable to emigrate; and these are the very parties who might be advantageously assisted by the public. It is difficult, indeed, to see how the money of the latter could be more profitably laid out than in helping forward emigration. Poor families in towns, or poor cottars on estates in England or Ireland, for whose services there is little or no demand, were they conveyed to America or Australia, would most likely become industrious and thriving. And they might be conveyed to either of these continents, and some provision made for their temporary subsistence in them, for less than a year's cost of their miserable maintenance in England. And though, as a general rule, it might be wrong for a state to undertake the charge of emigration, still a great deal might be done by assisting parishes or landlords in removing paupers and other poor parties wishing to emigrate. So long as there is an extraordinary demand for labour in Australia and America, and anything like a surplus supply in England or Ireland, so long will it be for the interest of all classes, but especially the poor, that labour should, like other things, be carried to the best market.

We shall be told, perhaps, that emigration may be carried to excess, and that the country may be deprived of an adequate supply of labour. But there is no real foundation for any such apprehension. That rise of wages which is the necessary consequence of every considerable emigration, progressively lessens the temptation to emigrate, and is an insuperable obstacle to its being carried to anything like an injurious extent. Previously to 1846, labour in Ireland was a mere drug; and low as wages were, the peasantry were not half employed. Even at present (1853), the towns are swarming with people driven from the country for whom there is no demand; and till they have pretty generally dis-

appeared, there can be nothing like an excess of emigration. Ireland is not, in fact, a country which, were its social economy in a sound state, would have a large population. The want of coal renders her unsuitable to most descriptions of manufactures. And the humidity of her climate, while it makes her ill suited for the growth of most varieties of corn, renders her admirably well fitted for pastoral purposes. Her herbage is the finest and most luxuriant in Europe. And under the free commercial system which is now being established, the presumption is, that the land of Ireland will be found to be much more productively employed in grazing than in tillage. This, at all events, is the conviction of some of those best acquainted with the circumstances, and best qualified to form a sound opinion upon them. And supposing it to be realized, population may yet be very greatly reduced, not only without any injury, but with much advantage to her future well-being.

But without farther speculating on such contingent and uncertain events, it is true, and should never be forgotten, that legislation, when most successful, merely improves, to a greater or less extent, the condition of the labourers generally. It does nothing peculiar for individuals. It leaves them where they should and must always be left, to depend on their own conduct and exertions: to be comfortable, if they practise thrift and industry; and wretched, if they indulge in waste and idleness.

CHAPTER III.

Natural or Necessary Rate of Wages, different in different Countries and Periods. Depends on the Quantity and Description of the Articles required for the Support of the Labourers. Influence of Fluctuations of the Rate of Wages over the Condition of the Labourers.

It has been seen, in the preceding chapter, that the market or current rate of wages in any country, at any given period, depends on the magnitude of its capital appropriated to the

payment of wages, compared with the number of its labourers. And it has also been seen, that in the event of the labouring population being increased more rapidly than capital, the rate of wages is inevitably reduced. But there are limits, however difficult it may be to specify them, to the extent to which a reduction of wages can be carried. The cost of producing labour, like that of producing other articles, must be paid by the purchaser. Work-people must, at all events, obtain a sufficient quantity of food, and of the other articles required for their support, and that of their families. This is the lowest amount to which the rate of wages can be permanently reduced; and it is for this reason that it has been called their *natural* or *necessary* rate. The market rate of wages may sink to the level of this necessary rate, but it is impossible it should continue below it. The labourer's ability to maintain himself, and to rear fresh labourers, does not, as already shown, depend on the money he receives as wages, but on the food and other articles required for his support for which that money will exchange. The natural or necessary rate of wages must, therefore, be determined by the cost of the food, clothes, &c., which form the maintenance of labourers.[1] It will be high where that food consists principally of expensive articles, such as butcher's-meat, and wheaten bread; lower where less animal food is consumed, and an inferior species of grain, such as oats, is used in making bread; and lower still, where animal food is wholly, or all but wholly, disused, and the place of bread is supplied with potatoes, turnips, and such like vegetables. The rate of necessary wages will also, it is evident, depend a good deal on other circumstances, on the superior and inferior lodging and clothing, and generally on the habits and customs of the poor. How high soever the price of indis-

[1] Humboldt states, that miners in Saxony are paid at the rate of 18 sols a day; whereas those who are employed at the same sort of work in the mines of Choco, in Peru, are paid six or seven times as much. Inasmuch, however, as the food and other articles consumed by the latter, exceed the price of those consumed by the former, in about the same proportion as their money wages, they are not really in any better condition.

pensable articles may rise, the labourers must always receive a supply equivalent for their support. If they did not obtain this much, they would be left destitute; and disease and death would continue to thin the population, until their numbers were so reduced, as compared with capital, that they could obtain the means of subsistence.

The opinion of those who contend that the rate of wages is in no degree influenced by the cost of the articles consumed by the labourers, has obviously originated in their confounding the principles which determine the current or market rate of wages with those which determine their natural or necessary rate. Nothing can be more true, than that the market rate of wages at any given moment, is exclusively determined by the proportion between capital and population. But in every inquiry of this nature, we should refer not only to particular points of time, but also to periods of some five, seven, or ten years duration; and if we do this we shall immediately perceive that the *average* rate of wages does not depend wholly on this proportion. The market price of shoes, to take a parallel case, is plainly dependant on the magnitude of their supply, compared with the demand of those who have the means and the wish to buy them. But if this price be less than the sum required to produce them and bring them to market they will cease to be supplied. And such is the case with labourers. They neither will, nor in fact can, be brought to market, unless the rate of wages be such as may suffice to bring them up and maintain them. From whatever point of the political compass we may set out, the cost of production is the grand principle to which we must always come at last. This cost determines the natural or necessary rate of wages just as it determines the average price of shoes, hats, or anything else. However low the demand for labour may be reduced, still, if the price of the articles required for the maintenance of the labourer be increased, the natural or necessary rate of wages must be increased also. Let us suppose, in illustration of this principle, that owing to a scarcity, the price of the quartern loaf rises to 5s. In this case it is plain,

inasmuch as the same number of labourers would be seeking for employment after the rise as before, and as a rise in the price of bread, occasioned by a scarcity, could not increase the demand for labour, that wages would not be increased. The labourers would, in consequence, be forced to economize, and the rise of price would have the beneficial effect of lessening the consumption, and of distributing the pressure equally throughout the year. But suppose that, instead of being occasioned by the accidental occurrence of a scarcity, the rise has been occasioned by an increased difficulty of production, and that it will be permanent, the question is, will the money wages of labour continue at their former elevation, or will they rise? Now, in this case it may be easily shown, that they will rise. For it is abundantly obvious, that the comforts of all classes of labourers would be greatly impaired by the rise in the price of bread; and that those who, previously to its taking place, had only enough to subsist upon, would now be reduced to a state of destitution, or rather of all but absolute famine. Under such circumstances, an increase of mortality could hardly fail to take place; while the greater difficulty of providing subsistence, would check the formation of matrimonial connexions, and the increase of population. By these means, therefore, either the amount of the population, or the ratio of its increase, or both, would be diminished. And this diminution, by lessening the number of labourers, and increasing the proportion of capital to population, would enable them to obtain higher wages.

These statements are not advanced on any arbitrary or supposed grounds, but have been deduced from, and are consistent with, the most comprehensive experience. Those who examine the registers of births, marriages, and deaths, kept in all large and populous cities, will find that there is invariably a diminution of the former, and an increase of the latter, whenever the price of corn or of the principal necessaries of life, sustains any material advance. "It will be observed," says Mr. Milne, in his "Treatise on Annuities," in reference to the prices of wheat in England, "that any material reduction

in the price of wheat is almost always accompanied by an increase both of the marriages and births, and by a decrease in the number of burials; consequently by an increase in the excess of the births above the deaths. Also, that any material rise in the price is generally attended by a corresponding decrease in the marriages and births, and by an increase in the burials; therefore, by a decrease in the excess of the births above the deaths. Thus it appears, that an increase in the quantity of food, or in the facility with which the labouring classes can obtain it, accelerates the progress of the population, both by augmenting the number of births, and diminishing the rate of mortality; and that a scarcity of food retards the increase of the people, by producing in both ways opposite effects." And in proof of the correctness of this statement, Mr. Milne gives, among many others to the same effect, the following account of the number of births and deaths within the London bills of mortality in 1798, 1800, and 1802.

	Births.	Deaths.	Price of Wheat.
1798	19,581	20,755	£2 10 3 per qr.
1802	21,308	20,260	3 7 5 "
Medium of these two years ...	20,445	20,508	2 18 10 per qr.
1800	18,275	25,670	5 13 7 "
Differences ...	2,170 Decrease.	5,162 Increase.	2 14 9 per qr. Increase.[1]

M. Messance, the author of a valuable work on the population of France ("Recherches sur la Population,") has collected a great deal of information on the same subject. He shows that those years in which corn has sold at the highest price, have also been those in which mortality was greatest and disease most prevalent; and that those on the contrary, in which corn has been cheapest, have been the healthiest and least mortal. In 1744, for example, when the price of wheat at

[1] Treatise on Annuities, vol. ii. pp. 390-402.

Paris was 11 livres 15 sols the septier, the number of deaths amounted to 16,205; and in 1753, when the price of wheat was 20 livres 3 sols, the deaths amounted to 21,716. In the *four* years of the *greatest* mortality at Paris—in the interval between 1743 and 1763—the average price of the septier of wheat was 19 livres 1 sol, and the average annual number of deaths 20,895; and in the *four* years of the *least* mortality during the same interval, the average price of the septier was 14 livres 18 sols, and the average annual number of deaths 16,859.

But it is needless to travel for evidence of what has now been stated, beyond the valuable reports of the present Registrar-General, George Graham, Esq. Owing to the different circumstances under which the population was placed in 1842 and 1845, in consequence of the fall in the price of corn, and the greater demand for labour, the marriages in the latter exceeded those in the former year by no fewer than 50,000.[1]

It may here, perhaps, be proper to mention, that it has been long observed that the tendency of wages is not to rise, but rather to fall, in unusually dear years. Several of the witnesses examined before Committees of the Houses of Lords and Commons, on the state of agriculture in 1814, endeavoured to prove, by comparing wages with the prices of corn and other necessaries, that there was really no such connexion between the two as has been supposed; and that instead of varying in the same way, wages were generally lowest in years when the price of corn was highest. But it is not difficult to explain the cause of this apparent anomaly. The truth is, that the number of labourers, which is never immediately reduced, is, in most cases, immediately increased by a rise of prices. In dear years, a greater number of females, and of poor children of both sexes, are obliged to engage in some species of employment; while the labourers hired by the piece endeavour, by increasing the quantity of their work, to obtain the means of purchasing their usual supply of food. It is natural, therefore, that the immediate effect of a rise of

[1] Eighth Report of Registrar-General.

prices should be to lower, not to raise wages. But those will fall into the greatest imaginable error who suppose that, because this is the immediate, it is also the permanent effect of such rise. It is obvious, indeed, that the fall of wages, which is thus occasioned, and the greater exertions which the rise of prices forces labourers to make, must tend, as well by lessening their supplies of food as by adding to the severity of their labour, to increase the rate of mortality, and consequently, by diminishing their numbers, to hasten that rise of wages which will certainly take place if prices continue high.

In endeavouring to show that the market rate of wages cannot be permanently reduced below the amount required to supply the labourers with necessaries, it is not meant to represent the latter as fixed and unvarying. If a given quantity of certain articles were absolutely necessary to enable work people to subsist and continue their race, then it is clear that no lasting deduction could be made from that quantity. But such is not the case. By the natural or necessary rate of wages, is meant only, in the words of Adam Smith, such a rate as will enable the labourer to obtain, "not only the commodities that are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without." It is plain, as well from this definition as from the previous statements, that there can be no invariable standard of natural or necessary wages. It is impossible to say what articles are indispensable for subsistence; inasmuch as they depend essentially on the physical circumstances under which every people is placed, and on custom and habit. Differences of climate, for example, by giving rise to very different wants in the inhabitants of different countries, necessarily occasion corresponding variations in the necessary rate of wages. Labourers in cold climates, who must be warmly clad, and whose cottages must be built of solid materials and heated with fires, could not subsist on the wages that suffice to supply

all the wants of those who inhabit more genial climates, where clothing, lodging, and fire, are of inferior importance. Humboldt mentions, that there is a difference of nearly a *third* in the cost of his maintenance, and consequently in the necessary wages of a labourer, in the hot and temperate districts of Mexico. The food, too, of work people in different and distant countries varies extremely. In some it is both expensive and abundant, compared to what it is in others. In England, for example, the lower classes principally live on wheaten bread and butcher's-meat, in Ireland on potatoes, and in China and Hindostan on rice. In many provinces of France and Spain an allowance of wine is considered indispensable. In England the labouring class entertain nearly the same opinion with respect to porter, beer, and cider; whereas the Chinese and Hindoos drink only water. The peasantry of Ireland have hitherto lived in miserable mud cabins, without either a window or a chimney, or anything that can be called furniture; while in England, the cottages of the peasantry have glass windows and chimneys, are well furnished, and are as much distinguished for their neatness, cleanliness, and comfort, as those of the Irish have been for their filth and misery. These differences in their manner of living occasion equal differences in their wages; so that, while the average price of a day's labour in England may be taken at from 20d. to 2s., it cannot be taken at more than 8d. or 10d. in Ireland and 3d. in Hindostan. The habits of the people of the same countries at different periods, and the articles which they have been accustomed to regard as indispensable, have been equally fluctuating and various. Everybody knows that the customary mode of living of the English and Scottish labourers of the present day is as widely different from that of their ancestors in the reigns of Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I., as it is from the mode of living of the labourers of France or Spain. The standard by which their wages was formerly regulated has been raised; there has been a greater prevalence of moral restraint; the proportion of capital to population has been increased; and the poor have learnt to form more elevated opinions

respecting the amount of necessaries and conveniences required for their subsistence.

But it is not necessary to travel beyond the confines of England to be satisfied of the great extent to which the rate of wages is dependant on the food and condition of the labourers. At present (1853) the wages of common field labour in Yorkshire and most parts of the north and east of England may be reckoned at about 15s. a week, whereas in Dorset, Somerset, and other south-western counties, it is little, if anything, more than half that amount. This comparative lowness of their wages is at once a consequence and a cause of the depressed condition of the peasantry in the counties referred to. Their greater dependence on the potato, by enabling them to subsist and increase their numbers on a less expensive food, has reduced their wages; and this reduction, by encroaching on their other comforts, has depressed their condition still lower.

The natural or necessary rate of wages is not, therefore, fixed and unvarying. It has a tendency to rise when the market rate rises, and to fall when it falls. The reason is, that the supply of labourers in the market can neither be speedily increased when wages rise, nor speedily diminished when they fall. When wages rise, a period of eighteen or twenty years must elapse before the stimulus which the rise gives to the principle of population can be felt in the market. And during all this period, the labourers have a greater command over necessaries and conveniences. Their habits are in consequence improved. And as they learn to form more elevated notions of what is required for their comfortable and decent support, the natural or necessary rate of wages is gradually augmented. But, on the other hand, when wages fall, either in consequence of a diminution of capital, or of a disproportionate increase of population, no corresponding diminution can immediately take place in the number of labourers, unless they have been previously subsisting on the smallest quantity of the cheapest species of food required to support mere animal existence. If they have have not been placed so

very near the extreme limit of subsistence, their numbers will not be immediately reduced when wages fall by an increase of mortality; but they will be gradually reduced, partly, as already shown, in that way, and partly by a diminished number of marriages and births. And in most countries, unless the fall were both sudden and extensive, it would require some years to make the effects of increased mortality, in diminishing the supply of labour, very sensibly felt; while the force of habit, and the universal ignorance of the people with respect to the circumstances which determine the rate of wages, might prevent any effectual check being given to matrimonial connexions, and consequently to the rate at which fresh labourers were coming into market, until the misery occasioned by the restricted demand for labour on the one hand, and its undiminished supply on the other, were generally and widely felt.

It is this circumstance—the impossibility of speedily adjusting the supply of labour proportionally to variations in the rate of wages—that gives to these variations their peculiar and powerful influence over the condition of the labouring classes. If the supply of labour were suddenly increased when wages rise, that rise would be of no advantage to the labourers. It would increase their number; but it would not enable them to rise in the scale of society, or to acquire a greater command over necessaries and conveniences. And on the other hand, if a fall of wages proportionally diminished the number of labourers, such diminution would hinder it from degrading the habits or the condition of those that survived. But, in the vast majority of instances, before a rise of wages can be countervailed by the greater number of labourers which it may be supposed to be the means of bringing into the market, time is afforded for the formation of those new and improved tastes and habits, which are not the hasty product of a day, a month, or a year, but the late result of a long series of continuous impressions. After these tastes have been acquired, population will advance in a slower ratio, as compared with capital, than formerly; and the labourers will be disposed rather to defer the period of marriage, than by entering

on it prematurely to depress their own condition and that of their children. But if the number of labourers cannot suddenly increase when wages rise, neither can it suddenly diminish when they fall. A fall of wages has therefore a precisely opposite effect, and is, in most cases, as injurious to the labourer as their rise is beneficial. In whatever way wages may be restored to their former level after they have fallen, whether it be by a decrease in the number of marriages, or an increase in the number of deaths, or both, it is never, except in the rare cases already mentioned, suddenly effected. Generally speaking, it requires a considerable time before it can be brought about; and hence an extreme risk arises lest the tastes and habits of the labourers, and their opinion respecting what is necessary for their subsistence, should be lowered in the interval. When wages are considerably reduced, the poor are obliged to economize, or to submit to live on a smaller quantity of necessaries and conveniences, and those probably, too, of an inferior species than they had previously been accustomed to. And the danger is, that the coarse and scanty fare which is thus, in the first instance, forced on them by necessity, should eventually become congenial from habit. Should this unfortunately be the case, their condition would be permanently depressed: and no principle would be left in operation, that could elevate wages to their former level. Under the circumstances supposed, the cost of raising and supporting work-people would be reduced; and it is by this cost that the current rate of wages must in the end be determined. A people, for example, who have been accustomed to live chiefly on wheat, may, from a scarcity of that grain, or a fall of wages, be forced to have recourse to oats or even potatoes; and in the event of their becoming satisfied with either, the standard of wages among them will be permanently reduced; and instead of being, as formerly, mainly determined by the price of wheat, it will, in time to come, be mainly determined by the price of oats or potatoes. This lowering of the opinions of the labouring class with respect to the mode in which they ought to live, is perhaps the most serious of all the evils that can befall

them. "If," says Mr. Laing, "the English labourers, instead of considering wheaten bread and meat necessary for their proper sustenance, were to be content with potatoes and salt herrings, the increase of pauperism among them would be in proportion to the diminished value of their food and the ease of obtaining it. The man who now thinks himself ill-off without the finest bread, would then think himself entitled to marry if he could earn potatoes for himself and a family. Our pauper population would thus increase with frightful rapidity."[1] Let a population once become contented with a lower description of food, and an inferior standard of comfort, and they may bid a long adieu to anything better. And every reduction of wages, which is not of a transient description, contributes to bring about this undesirable result, unless its debasing influence be defeated by greater industry and economy, and an increased prevalence of moral restraint.

CHAPTER IV.

Disadvantage of Low Wages, and of having the Labourers habitually fed on the cheapest species of food. Advantage of High Wages.

THE opinion, that a low rate of wages is advantageous, has frequently been advocated; but we are firmly persuaded that there is none more completely destitute of foundation. If the condition of the labourers be depressed, the prosperity of the other classes can rest on no solid foundation. They always form the great bulk of every society; and wherever their wages are low, they must, of necessity, live on coarse and scanty fare. Men placed under such circumstances are without any sufficient motive to be industrious, and, instead of activity and enterprise, we have sloth, ignorance, and improvidence. The examples of such individuals or bodies of individuals, as submit quietly to

[1] Travels in Norway, cap. 1.

have their wages reduced, and who are content if they get only mere necessaries, should never be held up for public imitation. On the contrary, everything should be done to make such apathy be esteemed discreditable. The best interests of society require that the rate of wages should be elevated as high as possible—that a taste for comforts and enjoyments should be widely diffused, and, if possible, engrafted into the national character. Low wages, by rendering it impossible for increased exertions to obtain any considerable increase of comforts and enjoyments, effectually hinders such exertions from being made; and is of all others the most powerful cause of that idleness and apathy that contents itself with what can barely continue animal existence.

Ireland furnishes a striking example of the disastrous consequences resulting from the depressed condition of the labouring classes. There the natural or necessary rate of wages is determined by the lowest standard. Having no taste for conveniences or luxuries, the Irish peasantry have been satisfied if they have had turf hovels for their habitations, rags for their raiment, and potatoes for their food. But as the potato is raised at less expense than any other variety of food hitherto cultivated in Europe, and as wages, where it forms nearly the sole subsistence of the labourers, are chiefly determined by its cost, it is evident that those who depend on it must be reduced to a state of almost irremediable distress, whenever it happens to be deficient. When the standard of wages is high—when wheat and beef, for example, form the principal food of the labourer, and porter and beer the principal part of his drink, he can bear to retrench. Such a man has room to fall. In a period of scarcity he can resort to cheaper varieties of food—to barley, oats, rice, maize, and potatoes. But he who is habitually and constantly fed on the cheapest species of food, has nothing to resort to when deprived of it. You may take from an Englishman, but you cannot take from an Irishman. The latter is already so low that he can fall no lower. He is placed on the very verge of

existence. His wages, being regulated by the cost of potatoes, will not buy him wheat, or barley, or oats. Whenever, therefore, potatoes fail, it is next to impossible he should escape falling a sacrifice to famine.

The history of the scarcities that so frequently occur in Ireland, affords many illustrations of the accuracy of the statements now made. Owing, for example, to the failure of the potato crop of 1821, the bulk of the peasantry of Clare, Limerick, and other counties bordering on the Shannon, were reduced to a state of almost absolute destitution, and had nothing but a miserable mixture consisting of a little oatmeal, nettles, and water-cresses to subsist upon. In some instances, the potatoes, after being planted, were dug up and eaten; and, in consequence of the insufficiency and bad quality of food, disease became exceedingly prevalent, and typhus fever, in its most malignant form, carried its destructive ravages into every corner of the country. The price of potatoes rose in Limerick, in the course of a few weeks, from about 2d. to 5d. and 7d. per stone, while the price of corn sustained no material elevation, none, at least, to prevent its being sent to the then overloaded markets of England.

But it is unnecessary to go back to 1821 for an example of this sort. Notwithstanding the all but total failure of the potato crop of 1846 in all parts of Ireland, and the consequent destitution of the peasantry, there was no very considerable falling off in the exports of corn, and other articles of provision, to England, till the contributions of government and of the British public were applied to purchase supplies for the Irish poor. And it is indeed obvious, that to whatever extremity a potato-feeding peasantry may be reduced, they cannot relieve themselves by purchasing corn. Did wheat, barley, or oats form the principal part of the food of the people of Ireland, corn would be poured into it in the same way that it is poured into England, as soon as it is known that the crop is materially deficient. But a population which is habitually dependent on the potato, having their wages regulated accordingly, cannot buy corn, or any higher

priced article. In periods of scarcity men cannot go from a low to a high level; they must always go from a higher to a lower. But to the Irish this is impossible. For having already reached the lowest point in the descending scale, dearth is to them attended with all the horrors of famine.

It is, therefore, quite essential to the protection of every people from famine, in seasons when the crops happen to be deficient, that they should not subsist principally on the cheapest species of food. They may use it in limited quantities as a subsidiary and subordinate article; but if they once adopt it for the principal part of their diet, their wages will be proportionally reduced; and whenever a period of deficient supply occurs, they will be left without any resource.

Besides its influence in depressing wages, the potato, considered as an article of subsistence, has sundry defects peculiar to itself, which deserve the most careful attention.

In the first place, owing to the greater quantity of food which is raised on a given extent of land under potatoes than if it were under corn or in pasture, the population of potato-feeding countries is, *cæteris paribus*, comparatively dense, and they have, consequently, on a scarcity occurring, a proportionally greater amount of destitution. In the second place, it is a defect peculiar to the potato, or affecting it in a much greater degree than most other articles, that the surplus produce of plentiful years cannot be stored up, or kept in reserve to meet the deficiencies of bad years, but that practically the subsistence of each year is measured by the produce of that year. Probably, however, the uncertainty of its produce and its bulk, and the consequent cost and difficulty of its conveyance, are the principal drawbacks on the use of the potato. Its yield varies extremely in different years, being very large in some, while in others it is next to nothing; and owing to the bulkiness of the article, it is practically impossible materially to alleviate the suffering occasioned by a failure of the crop in one country by importations

from others. In 1846, for example, all the navy of England would have been incapable of importing potatoes, supposing they could have been got, sufficient to meet the falling off in the supply in Ireland. Hence it is that those who principally depend on this precarious resource are almost entirely shut out from all participation in the benevolent arrangement made by Providence for equalizing the variations in the harvests of particular countries by means of commerce. They have, as it were, isolated themselves, and being made to depend in great measure on their own limited resources, are infinitely more liable to the chances of famine.

It is of as much importance to the peace and good order of society, as to the comfort and happiness of individuals, that wages should be maintained at a high elevation. The higher the notions entertained by the labouring classes of what is necessary for their support, and the greater the number and the intensity of their artificial wants, the more secure is their position. When a revulsion takes place in any great department of industry, or when the crops fail, workpeople who have been in the enjoyment of a considerable amount of luxuries, may, by parting with them, still obtain a sufficient supply of necessaries. But those who are divested of all artificial wants, who neither drink ale nor use tobacco, who care neither for comfortable clothes nor comfortable lodgings, and who are satisfied if they have as many potatoes as will suffice for their support and that of their families, can make no retrenchments. Such people cannot part with what is convenient to obtain what is necessary. Their subsistence having been reduced to a *minimum*, famine must unavoidably follow any reduction of its quantity.

We do not, however, mean by anything now stated, to say or insinuate, that artificial wants, however different, are equally advantageous. Some of them, such as the prevalent taste for gin and tobacco, especially the former, cannot be too much regretted. Intemperance is the bane, the leading vice, of the lower classes of this country. They are impove-

rished by the loss of the immense sums lavished on this miserable gratification, at the same time that indulgence in it leads to idleness and crime, undermines the constitution, and brings on wretchedness and premature old age. Nothing, therefore, would be so likely to be advantageous to the labouring class as the substitution of some other and less exceptionable taste, such as the desire to have better houses and furniture, better clothes, or better food, for the taste for gin and tobacco. But, bad as the latter is, still it is better than none. Were the labouring class to relinquish the taste for gin and tobacco, without substituting some one else of equal potency in its stead, their wages would be reduced accordingly. And when a period of distress came they would be still less able than at present to retrench, to abandon superfluities or luxuries, that they might acquire necessaries. And if they had nothing on which to fall back when there was a want of employment, or the crop happened to be deficient, what would then be the fate of the richer class of citizens, if there were any such in the country? It is justly observed by Lord Bacon, that "*of all rebellions those of the belly are the worst.*" Is it possible for human beings without food to be quiet, orderly, and to respect the rights of others? Is it to be supposed, that those who have nothing will submit to be starved without previously attempting to seize on the property of others? Whatever may be said to the contrary, famine and the virtues of patience and resignation are not on very companionable terms. Much, unquestionably, of the crime and bloodshed with which Ireland has been disgraced and deluged, must be traced to former oppression and the character of her people. But much also has been owing to the recklessness and despair occasioned by their abject poverty, and their habitual dependence on the potato. The right of property will never be respected by those who are destitute of all property, and whose wages are totally incompetent to afford them the means of its acquisition. Such persons are disposed to regard it rather as a bulwark thrown up to secure the interests of a few favourites of fortune, than as

being essential to the public welfare. It is only where labour is well rewarded, and where the mass of the people have the ability to save some portion of their earnings, and acquire a *stake in the hedge*, that they become interested in the support of the great fundamental principles necessary to the existence of society. These they otherwise regard either with indifference or aversion, and attack them on the slightest provocation.

It has been contended by Arthur Young, Franklin, and many other philosophers, of whose benevolence and zeal in the cause of humanity no doubt can be entertained, and to whose opinions on most subjects great deference is due, that high wages, instead of encouraging industry, become a fruitful source of idleness and dissipation. It is, indeed, a common allegation, that if the poor can earn as much in three or four days as will support them during the week, they will absent themselves for the remainder of it from their employment, and indulge in all manner of excesses. Nothing, however, can be more incorrect than to apply such representations to the poor generally. In every country and situation of life, numbers of individuals will no doubt be always found who are careless of the future, and intent only on present enjoyment; and where wages are low, and employment is subject to much fluctuation, the improvident class becomes comparatively large. But unless the population be at once exceedingly poor, and their ideas of what is necessary for their proper support exceedingly degraded, the principle of accumulation always predominates in aggregate bodies over the passion for expense. Wherever wages are so low as to render it impossible for an ordinary increase of exertion to make any material addition to the comforts and conveniences of the labourers, they invariably sink into a state of sluggish and stupid indifference. But the desire to rise in the world, and to improve our condition, is too deeply seated in the human breast ever to be wholly eradicated. And if labour be rendered more productive, if an increase of industry bring along with it a proportional increase of comforts and enjoyments, indolence gives place to exertion;

a taste for convenienecs and enjoyments gradually diffuses itself; increased exertions are made to obtain them; and ultimately the workman considers it discreditable to be without them.

"The liberal reward of labour," says Adam Smith, "as it encourages the propagation, so it increases the industry, of the common people. The wages of labour are the encouragement of industry, which, like every other human quality, improves in proportion to the encouragement it receives. A plentiful subsistence increases the bodily strength of the labourer; and the comfortable hope of bettering his condition, and of ending his days perhaps in ease and plenty, animates him to exert that strength to the utmost. Where wages are high, accordingly, we shall always find the workman more active, diligent, and expeditious, than where they are low; in England, for example, than in Scotland; in the neighbourhood of great towns than in remote country places. Some workmen, indeed, when they can earn in four days what will maintain them through the week, will lie idle the other three. This, however, is by no means the case with the greater part. Workmen, on the contrary, when they are liberally paid by the piece, are very apt to overwork themselves, and to ruin their health and constitution in a few years. A carpenter in London, and in some other places, is not supposed to last in his utmost vigour above eight years. Something of the same kind happens in many other trades, in which workmen are paid by the piece, as they generally are in manufactures, and even in country labour, wherever wages are higher than ordinary. Almost every class of artificers is subject to some peculiar infirmity, occasioned by excessive application to their peculiar species of work. Ramazzini, an eminent Italian physician, has written a particular book concerning such diseases. We do not reckon our soldiers the most industrious set of people among us: yet when soldiers have been employed in some particular sorts of work, and liberally paid by the piece, their officers have frequently been obliged to stipulate with the undertaker, that they shall not be allowed to earn above a

certain sum every day, according to the rate at which they were paid. Till this stipulation was made, mutual emulation, and the desire of greater gain, frequently prompted them to overwork themselves, and to hurt their health by excessive labour. Excessive application during four days of the week, is frequently the real cause of the idleness of the other three, so much and so loudly complained of. Great labour, either of mind or body, continued for several days together, is in most men naturally followed by a great desire of relaxation, which, if not restrained by force, or by some strong necessity, is almost irresistible. It is the call of nature, which requires to be relieved by some indulgence, sometimes of ease only, but sometimes, too, of dissipation and diversion. If it is not complied with, the consequences are often dangerous and sometimes fatal, and such as almost always, sooner or later, bring on the peculiar infirmity of the trade. If masters would always listen to the dictates of reason and humanity, they have frequently occasion rather to moderate than to animate the application of many of their workmen. It will be found, I believe, in every sort of trade, that the man who works so moderately as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his health the longest, but, in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of work."[1]

If an increase of wages ever discourages industry, it must be the industry of those who have previously been straining every nerve to obtain mere subsistence, or the forced industry of the indolent and the dissolute. And even to produce this effect on them, the increase must be sudden and transitory, not gradual and permanent. We are warranted in affirming, that a steadily high rate of wages never has had, and never will have, any such effect. It is nugatory to pretend, that if work-people be capable of earning, by an ordinary degree of application, more than is sufficient for their decent support, they alone, of all the various ranks and orders of the community, will waste the surplus in riot and debauchery. They have the same common sense, and are actuated by the same

[1] Wealth of Nations, p. 37.

passions, feelings, and principles, as other men. And being so, it is clear they will not generally be guilty of such inconsiderate conduct. But without insisting further on considerations of this sort, the state of industry in countries where wages are low, compared with its state in those where they are high, proves all that has now been said. Have the *low* wages of the Irish, the Poles, and the Hindoos, made them industrious? or the *high* wages of the Americans, the English, and the Hollanders, made them lazy, riotous, and profligate? Just the contrary. The former are notoriously and proverbially indolent, whereas the latter are laborious, active, and enterprising. The experience of all ages and nations proves that liberal wages are the keenest spur to assiduous exertion. They give to workmen, not only a considerable command over necessaries and conveniences, but also a considerable power of accumulation. And though the number of those who culpably neglect, partly from one cause and partly from another, to avail themselves of the means in their power to acquire something like a security against want, may, in a populous country like this, be very large, still it would be most inaccurate and unfair to say that such is generally the case with the poor, or that they are insensible to, or incapable of appreciating, the blessings of independence. This, we admit, is the case with far too many; but it is not the case with the majority. And we would fain hope, that as sounder opinions on such subjects become more and more diffused, and vicious habits bring along with them a greater share of the public contempt, this majority will increase. The most inconsiderate, however, as well as the most considerate individuals, are alive to the advantage of high wages. Though they spend them differently, they are equally acceptable to both. Wherever they obtain, every man feels that he derives a tangible advantage from the right of property, that without it he would not be able peaceably to enjoy the fruits of his industry; and he consequently becomes interested in its support, and in the maintenance of the public tranquillity. It is not when wages are high, and provisions abundant, but when they are low, or provisions scarce

and high-priced, that the manufacturing and thickly-peopled districts are disturbed by popular clamours and commotions. It was said of old, *Nihil lætius est populo Romano saturo*. And this is not the case in Rome or Britain only, but in all countries. *Dans aucune histoire, on ne rencontre un seul trait qui prove que l'aisance du peuple par le travail a nui à son obeissance.*[1] In fact there cannot be a doubt, notwithstanding all that has been said and written to the contrary, that high wages are the most effectual means of promoting industry and frugality among the labouring class, and of attaching them to the institutions under which they live; while they have the farther advantage, if properly husbanded, of insuring a comfortable subsistence and good education to youth, and of preventing old age and sickness from being driven to seek an asylum in workhouses and hospitals.

Poverty, like vice, is never so little feared as it is by those who are already entangled in its meshes. It is a familiar observation, that the lower we descend in the scale of society, the nearer we come to the haunts of vice, poverty, and wretchedness, the more is recklessness found to prevail. But, though the circumstance be of much greater importance, it is not so often remarked, that this very recklessness is at once the most efficient cause, and the most common result, of the wretchedness so much and so justly deplored. Abstinence is usually least practised by those to whom it is most essential. An ignorant and impoverished population eagerly grasp, like the lower animals, at immediate gratifications. And it is not till some circumstance occurs to improve their condition, either by directly increasing the demand for labour, or by awakening them to a sense of the folly and turpitude of their conduct, that they begin to look forward to the results of their actions.

It may perhaps be urged that these statements must be fallacious; for happiness, we are told, does not depend on a man's being supplied with various and costly articles, or on his accommodation being superior, but on his being on a level with those around him. And it is said that an Irishman plentifully

[1] Forbonnais, *Recherches sur les Finances*, tome i. p. 109.

supplied with potatoes, is quite as contented, and has as keen a relish of life, as a London workman, who must have bread, beef, and porter. But though this may be true, it is little to the purpose. An American Indian, who has just killed a buffalo, has less care perhaps, and a more intense feeling of enjoyment, than the richest merchant of New York. But are we, on that account, to set the savage on the same level as the civilized man? or poverty on the same level as wealth? It may be all very well so long as the Irishman has his potatoes, and the Indian his buffaloes. But what is their condition when these happen to fail? They have no resource, nothing else upon which to retreat. And the famine that, under such circumstances, sweeps off whole tribes of Indians, would make equal ravages among the Irish, were it not mitigated or warded off by contributions raised by others.

Nothing, therefore, we repeat it again, can be so disadvantageous to any people, as a permanent depression in the rate of wages, or a decline in the opinions of the labouring class, respecting the articles necessary for their subsistence. No country can be flourishing where wages are low; and none can be long depressed where they are high. The labourers are the thews and sinews of industry. Their numbers are not estimated, like those of other classes, by hundreds, by thousands, or even by hundreds of thousands, but by *millions!* It is by them that our machinery is constructed and kept in motion; that our agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, are successfully carried on; and that we have been enabled easily to support burdens that could hardly have been supported by any other people.[1] Everything, then, that may have the slightest tendency to depress their condition, or sink them in the social scale, should be most particularly guarded against. Those who feed and clothe all the rest, should themselves be well fed and well clothed. They are the foundation of the social pyramid; and so long as the standard of

[1] A great many taxes have been reduced and repealed since the peace; and several of the continental states are now more heavily taxed than this.

wages continues high, this foundation will be solid and secure; for so long will the labourers be industrious and orderly. But, if this standard were permanently reduced, if the labourers were brought to place their principal dependence on the cheapest food, and to rest satisfied with mere necessaries, the want of sufficient motives to exertion would infallibly render them idle and dissipated. The spirit of industry by which they are now so eminently distinguished, would evaporate; and with it the prosperity and tranquillity of Britain!

These statements sufficiently show, that it is as much for the interest of governments, with a view to their own security, as it is their duty with a view to the happiness of their subjects, to do all in their power to improve the condition of the labouring classes, by adopting such wise and liberal measures as may be most favourable to the increase of capital, and as may contribute most to elevate the opinions of the labourers, and the standard of wages. It will be found, too, on taking an enlarged view of the subject, that the real and permanent interests of the capitalists, or employers of labour, should point out to them the propriety of their adopting a similar course. At first sight it does indeed appear as if their interests were opposed to those of the labourers; but such is not really the case. The interests of both are at bottom identical; and it has been already seen that all the wealth of the country applicable to the payment of wages is uniformly, in all ordinary cases, divided among the labourers. It is true, that when wages are increased, profits are at the same time most commonly reduced. But it does not, therefore, follow that capitalists would be placed in a really preferable situation were wages to fall and profits to rise. The rate of profit, how important soever, is not the only thing to which they have to look. Security and tranquillity are still more indispensable than high profits to the successful prosecution of industrious undertakings. And these are rarely found where wages are low, and the mass of the people immersed in poverty and des-

titution. Wherever this is the case, the poor are deterred by nothing, save the fear of the law, from engaging in all sorts of dangerous projects; and are always ready to listen to those who tell them that their unhappy condition is a consequence of misgovernment, and of the selfishness of their employers. Under such unfortunate circumstances, industry and enterprise are paralyzed, and the condition of the capitalists is, if anything, worse than that of the labourers.

Hence, while it is impossible for the employers of labour artificially to reduce the rate of wages, it is further obvious that such reduction, could it be effected, would rarely, if ever, be for their advantage; for unless wages were previously at an unusually high elevation, it would naturally be followed by a diminution of that security which is essential to their interests. The conduct of those who pretend to wish for the improvement of the poor, and who at the same time complain of high wages, is in fact contradictory, and must be ascribed to hypocrisy or folly, or both—the former because an increase of wages is the only, or at all events the most effectual and ready means by which the condition of the poor can be really improved, and the latter because high wages are incomparably the best defence of the estates and mansions of the rich.

Paley says, "It is in the choice of every man of rank and property to become the benefactor or the scourge, the guardian or the tyrant, the example or the corrupter of the virtue, of his servants, his tenants, his neighbourhood; to be the author to them of peace or contention, of sobriety or dissoluteness, of comfort or distress."[1] This statement is more applicable to parties living in the country than to those who live in towns, or who carry on large manufacturing establishments, the masters of which can know little or nothing of the workpeople in their employ, except what they may learn of their conduct in the mill or factory. But it is, notwithstanding, in a greater or less degree, applicable to all varieties of employers; their respective situations imposing on them corresponding obligations and responsibilities. Those who neglect

[1] Works, v. 97 edition, 1819.

the means of benefiting their inferiors, which Providence has placed at their command, are culpable in more ways than one. It would not, indeed, be easy to overrate the good that might eventually be accomplished were masters, who have the opportunity, generally to bestow some little attention on the character and conduct of those in their service; to assist them in establishing schools and useful libraries; and to satisfy them that those who distinguish themselves by the superior condition of their dwellings and families, their greater deposits in the savings' bank, &c., will not be overlooked or forgotten. In doing this, they would contribute to raise the character of the labouring class, and to strengthen the foundations of public peace and prosperity.

Much has latterly been said, and with great justice, in regard to the beneficial effects that could hardly fail to follow from an improvement in the dwellings of the poor. In towns, where the iujurious influence of the over-crowded, ill ventilated, and filthy habitations of the lower classes is especially evident, a good deal might probably be effected by judicious police regulations in regard to the building and occupation of inferior houses. And in the country, where cottages are often of a very miserable description, the landlords might, with a little attention and outlay, effect the greatest improvements. Besides the various benefits that it would confer on the cottiers, there are few things that would redound so much to the credit of the owners of estates, or add so much to the beauty of the latter, as having them studded with neat, clean, and comfortable cottages.[1]

But though the conduct of government and of the wealthier classes, as regards the poor, were all that could be desired, still its direct influence over individuals must necessarily be confined to a comparatively small number of cases, while its indirect influence over the mass is usually feeble and but

[1] The Duke of Bedford, and some other noblemen and gentlemen, have done themselves much honour by the improvements they have effectod in the cottages on their estates.

slowly manifested. What others can do for them is, in truth, but as the small dust of the balance compared with what they may do for themselves. The situation of most men not born to affluence, is always in great measure dependent on their own exertions. And this is most especially true of the labouring classes, the great majority of whom can owe nothing to patronage or favour. Industry, frugality, and forethought, are their only friends. But, happily, they are all-powerful. And how unpromising soever their situation, those who avail themselves of their willing assistance, are never disappointed, but secure in the end their own comfort and that of their families. Those, on the contrary, who neglect their aid, though otherwise placed under the most favourable circumstances, inevitably sink into a state of misery. The contrast between a well cultivated field and one that is neglected and overrun with thorns and brambles, is not greater than the contrast between the condition of the diligent and slothful, the careful and the wasteful labourers. The cottages of the former are clean, neat, and comfortable, their children well clothed and well instructed; whereas the cottages of the latter are slatternly and uncomfortable, being often little better than pig-styes, and their children in rags and ignorant. No increase of wages can be of any permanent advantage to the one class, while the smallest increase conduces to the well-being of the other. *Vigilando, agendo, bene consulendo, prospere omnia cedunt.* But on the other hand, *ubi socordiæ te atque ignaviæ tradideris nequicquam deos implores; irati infestique sunt.* "If," says Barrow, "wit or wisdom be the head, if honesty be the heart, industry is the right hand of every vocation: without which the shrewdest insight and best attention can execute nothing." (Second Sermon on Industry.)

CHAPTER V.

Different Rates of Wages in Different Employments—Circumstances on which these Differences depend.

In the previous chapters of this Treatise, we have endeavoured to investigate the circumstances which determine wages in general. But every one is aware, that while their ordinary rate in some employments does not perhaps exceed 2s., 3s., or 4s. a-day, it may at the same time amount to 3s., 4s., 5s., or upwards in others. The consideration of the circumstances which occasion this inequality, will form the subject of this chapter.

Were all employments equally agreeable and healthy, the labour to be performed in each of the same intensity, and did they all require the same degree of dexterity and skill on the part of the labourer, it is evident, supposing industry to be quite free, that there would be no permanent or considerable difference in the wages paid to those engaged in them. For if, on the one hand, the work-people engaged in a particular business earned *more* than their neighbours, the latter would gradually leave their employments to engage in it, until their influx had reduced wages to their common level; and if, on the other hand, those employed in a particular business earned *less* than their neighbours, there would be an efflux of hands from it, until, by their diminution, the wages of those who remained had been raised to the common level. In point of fact, however, the intensity of the labour in different employments, the degree of skill and training required to carry them on, their healthiness, and the estimation in which they are held, differ exceedingly; and these varying circumstances necessarily occasion proportional differences in the wages of those engaged in them. Wages are a compensation paid to the labourer for the exertion of his physical powers, skill, and ingenuity. They, therefore, vary according to the severity of the labour to be performed, and to the skill and ingenuity

required. A jeweller or engraver, for example, must be paid higher wages than a common farm servant or day labourer. A long course of training is necessary to instruct a man in the business of a jeweller or engraver; and if the cost of this training were not made up to him by a higher rate of wages, instead of learning so difficult an art, he would addict himself, in preference, to such employments as hardly require any instruction. Hence the discrepancies that actually obtain in the rate of wages are confined within certain limits—increasing or diminishing it only in so far as may be necessary fully to equalize the unfavourable or favourable circumstances attending any employment.

The following have been stated by Smith as the principal circumstances which occasion the rate of wages in some employments, to fall below, and in others to rise above, the *average* rate of wages:—

1st. The agreeableness or disagreeableness of the employments.

2nd. The easiness or cheapness, or the difficulty and expense, of learning them.

3rd. The constancy or inconstancy of the employments.

4th. The small or great trust that must be reposed in those who carry them on.

5th. The probability or improbability of succeeding in them.

First. The *agreeableness* of an employment may arise either from physical or moral causes—from the lightness of the labour, its healthiness or cleanliness, the degree of estimation in which it is held, &c.; and its disagreeableness arises from the opposite circumstances—from the severity of the labour, its unhealthiness or dirtiness, the degree of odium attached to it, &c. The rate of wages must obviously vary with the variation of circumstances exerting so powerful an influence over labourers. It is not to be supposed that any individual should be so blind to his own interest as to engage or continue in an occupation considered as mean and disreputable, or where the labour is severe, if he obtain only the same rate of

wages that may be obtained by engaging in employments in higher estimation, or where the labour is comparatively light. The labour of a ploughman is not unhealthy, nor is it either irksome or disagreeable; but being more severe than that of the shepherd, it is uniformly better rewarded. This principle holds universally. Gilders, type-founders, smiths, distillers, and all who carry on unhealthy, disagreeable, and dangerous businesses, invariably obtain a higher rate of wages than those artificers who, having equal skill, are engaged in more desirable occupations. The unfavourable opinion entertained respecting some businesses, has a similar effect on wages as if the labour to be performed in them were unusually unhealthy or severe. The trade of a butcher, for example, is generally looked upon as low and discreditable, and this feeling causes such a disinclination on the part of young men to enter it, as can only be overcome by the high wages which butchers are said to earn, notwithstanding the lightness of their labour. This also is the reason why the keeper of a small inn or tavern, who is never master of his own house, and who is exposed to the brutality of every drunkard, exercises one of the most profitable of the common trades. The contrary circumstances have contrary effects. Hunting and fishing are, in an advanced stage of society, among the most agreeable amusements of the rich. But from their being held in this degree of estimation, and from the lightness of their labour, those who practise them as a trade generally receive very small wages, and are proverbially poor. The agreeableness and healthiness of their employments, rather than the lightness of their labour, or the little skill which they require, seem to be the principal cause of the redundant numbers, and consequent low wages, of the workmen employed in ordinary field labour.

The grinding of knives, razors, and other cutting instruments, is a very deleterious trade. The minute particles of steel thrown off from the metal in the process of grinding float in the atmosphere, and being taken into the lungs, occasion consumptions and other diseases of the respiratory system. Various contrivances have been suggested to obviate

this result, but hitherto with no very marked success; and the mortality in this class of work-people continues to be very high. Their wages are in consequence considerably above the common level. But they are not so high as might have been anticipated from the extreme risk attending the business. And it is a curious fact, attested, we believe, by universal experience, that great danger leads rather to recklessness than to any systematic efforts to lessen or obviate the risk. Dissipation and excess of all kinds are never so prevalent as in cities subject to the plague. And the grinders are said to be, notwithstanding their high wages, the most depressed, dissipated, and reckless of the Sheffield workmen.[1] These, however, though they be the common, are not the universal characteristics of the class; and those workmen who are sober, and who use the necessary precautions, are comparatively comfortable and long-lived.

Mining, though it cannot be called an unhealthy employment, is extremely disagreeable, dirty, and dangerous. And it is really surprising that individuals should be found, who are ready, without stipulating for any very extraordinary wages, to pass their time in working in coal and other mines; generally in a crouching posture; and sometimes, when the beds are narrow, lying on their sides, exposed all the while to the imminent risk of being blown to pieces. The recklessness of most miners, or their insensibility to danger, is indeed quite astonishing. Many of them object to use the Davy lamp, because, though it lessens danger, it at the same time lessens light. And as they will not themselves take the necessary precautions, it might perhaps be expedient to interest their masters in their observance, by making them liable for the support of the widows and orphan children of the miners who lose their lives by explosions.

The quicksilver mines of Almaden, in Spain, some of the processes in which are extremely unhealthy, were formerly wrought by convicts; but this plan has been abandoned, and they are now wrought by labourers hired for the purpose.

[1] Letter on Sheffield, *Morning Chronicle*, 15th February, 1850.

The latter, however, do not continue in the mines during the entire year. They leave them for some months in the summer and autumn, when they are most unhealthy; and, by means of this precaution, their health is comparatively well preserved.

The severe discipline, the various hardships to which common soldiers are exposed, and the little chance they have of arriving at a higher station, are unfavourable circumstances, which, it might be supposed, would require a high rate of wages to counterbalance. There are really, however, but few common trades in which labourers can be procured for such low wages as those for which recruits are willing to enlist in the army. And it is not difficult to discover the causes of this apparent anomaly. Except when actually engaged in warlike operations, a soldier is comparatively idle; while his free, dissipated, and generally adventurous life, the splendour of his uniform, the imposing spectacle of military parades and evolutions, and the martial music with which they are accompanied, exert a most seductive influence over the young and inconsiderate. The dangers and privations of campaigns are undervalued, while the chances of advancement are exaggerated in their sanguine and heated imaginations. "Without regarding the danger," says Smith, "soldiers are never obtained so easily as at the beginning of a new war; and though they have scarce any chance of preferment, they figure to themselves, in their youthful fancies, a thousand occasions of acquiring honour and distinction which never occur. These romantic hopes make the whole price of their blood. Their pay is less than that of common labourers, and in actual service their fatigues are much greater."

It is observed by Smith, that the chances of succeeding in the sea service are greater than in the army. "The son of a creditable labourer or artificer may frequently go to sea with his father's consent: but if he enlists as a soldier, it is always without it. Other people see some chance of his making something by the one trade: nobody but himself sees any of his making anything by the other." But the allure-

ments to enlist in the army are, notwithstanding, found to be much greater than those which prompt young men to enter the navy. The life of a sailor is perhaps more adventurous than that of a soldier; but he has no regular uniform; his employment is comparatively dirty and disagreeable; his labour more severe; and while at sea, he suffers a species of imprisonment, and cannot, like the soldier, excite either the envy or admiration of others. In consequence, the wages of seamen almost invariably exceed those of soldiers; and there is a greater difficulty of obtaining recruits at the breaking out of a war.

In England, the disadvantages and drawbacks naturally incident to a seafaring life, have been considerably increased by the practice of impressment. The violence and injustice to which sailors are exposed, by their liability to impressment, tend to prevent young men from entering on board ship, and thus, by artificially lessening the supply of sailors, raise their wages above their natural level, to the extreme injury both of the queen's and the merchant service. "The custom of impressment puts a freeborn British sailor on the same footing as a Turkish slave. The Grand Seignior cannot do a more absolute act than to order a man to be dragged away from his family, and, against his will, run his head against the mouth of a cannon; and if such acts should be frequent in Turkey, upon any one set of useful men, would it not drive them away to other countries, and thin their numbers yearly? and would not the remaining few double or triple their wages? which is the case with our sailors, in time of war, to the great detriment of our commerce." [1]

In proof of the accuracy of this statement, it may be mentioned, that while the wages of all other sorts of labourers and artisans are uniformly higher in the United States than in England, those of sailors are generally lower. The reason is, that the navy of the United States is manned by means of voluntary enlistment only. The Americans are desirous

[1] Richardson's Essay on the Causes of the Decline of Foreign Trade. Ed. 1756, p. 24.

of becoming a great naval power, and they have wisely relinquished a practice which would have driven their best sailors from their service, and have forced them to man their fleet with the sweepings of their gaols.

It has been estimated that there were above 16,000 British sailors on board American ships at the close of last war; and the wages of English seamen had then risen to about double the rate paid to the Americans. This extraordinary influx of British seamen into the American service, and the no less extraordinary rise in their wages at home, can only be accounted for by our continuing to resort to impressment after it was abandoned by the United States. Formerly our seamen were in the habit, on the breaking out of wars, of deserting to Holland; but the difference of language was an insuperable obstacle to their carrying this practice to any very injurious extent. Deserters to the United States do not, however, encounter any such obstacle. There our sailors are assured of a safe asylum among their kindred and friends—among those whose language, religion, customs, and habits are identical with their own—and who are anxious to avail themselves of every means by which they may draw them to their service. The abolition of impressment will be indispensable to countervail such overpowering inducements to desertion. And, as it has been shown, that impressment is not really necessary for the manning of the fleet,[1] we trust that it may be finally abolished; and that the efforts of the Americans to increase their naval power may not be assisted by our obstinately clinging to a system fraught with injustice and oppression.

The officers of the army and navy, and many of those functionaries who fill situations of great trust and responsibility, receive only a small pecuniary remuneration. The consideration attached to such situations, and the influence they confer on their possessors, form a principal part of their salary.

Secondly, The wages of labour in particular businesses

[1] Wealth of Nations—Note XII.

vary according to the comparative facility with which they may be learned.

There are several sorts of labour which a man may perform without any, or but little, previous instruction; and in which he will, consequently, gain a certain rate of wages from the moment he is employed. But, in civilized societies, a great variety of employments can be carried on by those only who have been regularly instructed in them. And it is evident, that the wages of such skilled labourers must exceed the wages of those who are comparatively rude, so as to afford them a sufficient compensation for the time they have lost and the expense they have incurred in their education. Suppose, to illustrate this principle, that the ordinary rate of wages paid to unskilled labourers is £35 a year; If the education of a skilled labourer—a jeweller or engraver, for example—and his maintenance up to the period when he begins to support himself, cost £300 more than is required for the maintenance of an unskilled labourer up to the same period, it is quite obvious that the former will not be in so good a situation as his unskilled neighbours, unless his wages exceed theirs by a sum sufficient not only to yield him the customary rate of profit on the extra sum of £300, expended on his education and maintenance, but to replace the sum itself previously to the probable termination of his life. If he obtain less than this, he will be underpaid; and if he obtain more he will be overpaid, and there will be an influx of new entrants, until their competition has reduced wages to their proper level.

The policy of Great Britain, and of most other European nations, has added to the necessary cost of breeding up skilled labourers, by forcing them to serve as apprentices for a longer period than is in most cases necessary to obtain a knowledge of the trades they mean to exercise. But, as the wages of labour must be proportioned, not only to the skill and dexterity of the labourer, but also to the time he has spent, and the difficulties and expense to which he has been put in learning his business, it is plain that if an individual be com-

pelled to serve an apprenticeship of *seven* years to a business which he might have learned in two or three years, he must obtain a proportionally higher rate of wages after the expiration of his apprenticeship, than would otherwise have sufficed for his remuneration. The institution of unnecessarily long apprenticeships is, therefore, productive of a double injury. It injures the employers of workmen, by artificially raising the wages of journeymen; and it injures the workmen, from its tendency to generate idle and dissipated habits, by making them pass so large a portion of their youth without any sufficient motive to be industrious.

By the common law of England, every man has a right to employ himself at pleasure in every lawful trade. But this sound principle was almost entirely subverted by a statute passed, in compliance with the solicitations of the corporate bodies, in the 5th year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, commonly called the Statute of Apprenticeship. It enacted that no person should, for the future, exercise any trade, craft, or mystery, at that time exercised in England or Wales, unless he had previously served to it an apprenticeship of *seven* years at least; and what had before been a bye-law of a few corporations, thus became the general and statute law of the kingdom. Fortunately, the courts of law were always singularly disinclined to enforce the provisions of this statute. Though the words of the act plainly include the whole kingdom of England and Wales, it was interpreted to refer only to *market towns;* and it was also interpreted to refer only to those trades which had been practised in England when the statute was passed, and to have no reference to such as had been subsequently introduced. This interpretation gave occasion to several very absurd and even ludicrous distinctions. It was adjudged, for example, that a coachmaker could neither himself make nor employ a journeyman to make his coach-wheels, but must buy them of a master wheelwright, this latter trade having been exercised in England before the 5th of Elizabeth. But a wheelwright, though he had never served an apprenticeship to a coach-

maker, might either make himself, or employ journeymen to make coaches, the trade of a coachmaker not being within the statute, because not exercised in England at the time when it was passed. The contradiction and absurdity of these regulations, and the impolicy and injurious operation of the statute had long been obvious; but so slow is the progress of sound legislation, and so powerful the opposition to every change affecting private interests, that it was not repealed until 1814. The Act for this purpose did not, however, interfere with any of the existing rights, privileges, or bye-laws of the different legally constituted corporations. But wherever these do not interpose, the formation of apprenticeships and their duration is now left to be adjusted by the parties themselves.

The class of female domestic servants comprises one of the largest divisions of the labouring population, and that, perhaps, which is best provided for. And as most descriptions of in-door female labour may be practised with but little training, it may seem difficult to account for the high wages paid to domestics, and for their superior condition as compared with needle-women, washer-women, and those females generally who depend on chance employment. But, though in many respects desirable, the situation of domestic servants, whether male or female, has several considerable drawbacks. They are subject to numerous restraints. And, besides performing their respective menial offices, they are obliged to conform, whether they like them or not, to the rules and regulations of the families in which they live. Most people have, however, a disinclination to be thus dictated to by others. And those who consent to execute menial offices at the bidding of masters and mistresses, feel that they are engaged in what is reckoned a mean and servile employment, and that they occupy a low position in the public estimation. There is, no doubt, much ill-founded prejudice in the estimate that is thus commonly formed of the station of household servants. We do not well see, supposing their education and other attainments to be equal, why a man's servants

should be deemed to be of a lower class than his tradesmen. But such, whether right or wrong, is the opinion of the public; and its influence, and the various restraints to which they are subject, prevent many from entering service, and by lessening their numbers, contribute to raise the wages of those engaged in it.

These circumstances account, in so far, for what has been reckoned the extraordinary fact of great distress frequently prevailing amongst needle-women in London, while the condition of female servants is so very good. But very few of the former class have any desire to range themselves in the latter. They are mostly the daughters of professional people, decayed tradesmen, shopkeepers, and such like parties; and have from infancy been taught to look upon domestics as a lower class, to which, rather than descend, they would undergo any privation. And it is not to be denied, that their condition, besides its higher place in the public estimation, has some real and some supposititious advantages on its side. If they be less comfortably provided for than household servants, they at all events enjoy a greater degree of freedom; and have more opportunities of becoming known, and of forming connexions and *liaisons*, sometimes of a more and sometimes of a less respectable kind. And thus it is that domestics owe to the servitude in which they are placed, and the unjustly low estimation in which they are held, their high wages, and comparatively comfortable condition.

The case of the hand-loom weavers affords a striking illustration of the unfavourable influence which the easy acquisition and conduct of a business usually has over the condition of those engaged in it. The art of weaving most fabrics may be learned with the greatest facility. And the lightness of the work, and the circumstance of its being principally carried on in the houses of the weavers, who are assisted by their families, make it be resorted to by a very large class of persons, many of whom are of weakly constitutions, and unable to engage in employments requiring considerable physical vigour. Hence the wages of hand-loom weavers are almost always below the

ordinary level of wages in the generality of businesses. Latterly they have, through the increasing competition of power looms, been reduced to a very low rate indeed, and the weavers have frequently been involved in extreme distress. But despite their low wages, the probability is, that the spread of power looms will in the end effect the all but total annihilation of the hand-weaving business. And there can be no doubt that the labouring class, as well as the other classes, will eventually gain by the change. In the meantime, however, the weavers have strong claims on the public sympathy; and every practicable means should be tried that may seem most likely to abridge and facilitate the painful state of transition in which they are involved, by introducing their children to other businesses, and by facilitating their emigration, or otherwise.

Thirdly, The wages of labour, in different employments, vary with the constancy and inconstancy of employment.

Employment is much more constant in some trades than in others. Many trades can only be carried on in particular states of the weather, and seasons of the year; and if the workmen who are engaged in such trades cannot easily find employment in others during the time they are thrown out of them, their wages must be proportionally augmented. A journeymen jeweller, weaver, shoemaker, or tailor, for example, may, under ordinary circumstances, reckon upon obtaining constant employment. But masons, bricklayers, paviors, and, in general, all those workmen who carry on their business in the open air, are liable to perpetual interruptions. Their wages must, however, not only suffice to maintain them while they are employed, but also during the time they are necessarily idle. And they ought also to afford them, as Dr. Smith has remarked, some compensation for those anxious and desponding moments which the thought of so precarious a situation must sometimes occasion.

This principle shows the fallacy of the opinion so generally entertained respecting the great earnings of porters, hackney

coachmen, watermen, and generally of all workmen employed only for short periods, and on particular occasions. Such persons frequently make as much in an hour or two as regularly employed workmen make in a day; but this greater hire, during the time they are employed, is found to be only a bare compensation for the labour they perform, and for the time they are necessarily idle. Instead of making money, they are almost invariably poorer than those who are engaged in more constant occupations.

The interruption to employments occasioned by the celebration of holidays, has a similar effect on wages. There are countries in which the holidays, excluding Sundays, make nearly a third part of the year; and the necessary wages of labour must there be about a third part, or 33⅓ per cent., greater than they probably would be were these holidays abolished.

Fourthly, The wages of labour vary according to the small or great trust reposed in the workmen.

"The wages of goldsmiths and jewellers are everywhere superior to those of many other workmen, not only of equal, but of much superior ingenuity; on account of the precious materials with which they are instrusted.

"We trust our health to the physician; our fortune, and sometimes our life and reputation, to the lawyer and attorney. Such confidence could not safely be reposed in people of a very mean or low condition. Their reward must be such, therefore, as may give them that rank in the society which so important a trust requires. The long time and the great expense which must be laid out in their education, when combined with this circumstance, necessarily enhance still further the price of their labour."[1]

Fifthly, The wages of labour, in different employments, vary according to the probability or improbability of success in them.

[1] Wealth of Nations.

This cause of variation chiefly affects the wages of the higher class of labourers, or of those who practise what are usually denominated liberal professions.

If a young man be bound apprentice to a shoemaker or tailor, there is hardly any doubt of his attaining to an ordinary degree of proficiency and expertness in his business, and that he will be able to live by it; whereas if he be bound apprentice to a lawyer, painter, sculptor, or player, there are perhaps three or four chances to one that he never attains to such a degree of proficiency in any of these callings as will enable him to subsist on his earnings. But in professions where many fail for one who succeeds, the fortunate one should not only gain such a rate of wages as may indemnify him for the expenses incurred in his education, but also for all that has been expended on the education of his unsuccessful competitors. It is abundantly certain, however, that the wages of lawyers, players, sculptors, &c., taken in the aggregate, never amount to so large a sum. The lottery of the law, and of the other liberal professions, has many great prizes, but there is, notwithstanding, a large excess of blanks. "Compute," says Adam Smith, "in any particular place, what is likely to be annually gained, and what is likely to be annually spent, by all the different workmen in any common trade, such as that of shoemakers or weavers, and you will find that the former sum will generally exceed the latter. But make the same computation with regard to all the counsellors and students of law, in all the different Inns of Court, and you will find that their annual gains bear but a very small proportion to their annual expense, even though you rate the former as high, and the latter as low, as can well be done. The lottery of the law, therefore, is very far from being a perfectly fair lottery; and that, as well as many other liberal and honourable professions, is, in point of pecuniary gain, evidently under-recompensed."

But the power, wealth, and consideration, which most commonly attend superior excellence in the liberal professions, and the overweening confidence placed by each individual in

his own good fortune, are sufficient to overbalance all the disadvantages and drawbacks that attend them, and never fail to crowd their ranks with all the most generous and aspiring spirits.

It is unnecessary to enter upon any farther details with respect to this part of our subject. It has been sufficiently proved, that wherever industry is free and unfettered, the permanent differences that obtain in the wages of those engaged in different employments, merely suffice to balance the favourable or unfavourable circumstances by which they are attended. When the cost of their education, the chances of their success, and the various disadvantages incident to their callings, have been taken into account, those who receive the highest wages are not really better paid than those who receive the lowest. The wages earned by different classes of workmen are equal, not when each individual earns the same number of shillings, or of pence, in a given space of time, but when each is paid in proportion to the severity of the labour he has to perform, the degree of previous education and skill that it requires, and the other causes of variation already specified. Wherever, indeed, the principle of competition is allowed to operate without restraint, and individuals may employ themselves as they please, we may be assured that the higgling of the market will always adjust the rate of wages, in different employments, on the principle now stated, and that they will be, all things considered, nearly equal. If wages in one employment be depressed below the common level, labourers will leave it to go to others; and if they be raised above that level, labourers will be attracted to it from those departments where wages are lower, until their increased competition has sunk them to their average standard. We do not, however, mean to affirm, that this equalization is in all cases immediately or speedily brought about. On the contrary, it often happens that, owing to an attachment to the trade, or the locality in which they have been bred, or the difficulty of learning other trades,

individuals will continue, for a lengthened period, to practise their peculiar trades, or will remain in the same district, when other trades in that district, and the same trades in other districts, yield better wages to those engaged in them. But how slowly soever, wages, taking everything into account, are sure to be equalized in the end. And the extraordinary facilities that are now afforded for becoming minutely acquainted with the various branches of industry carried on in all parts of the country, and of travelling from one point to another, will no doubt hasten the adjustment of wages, according to the advantages and disadvantages incident to different businesses and localities. Without, however, insisting on these considerations, it is enough to state, that all inquiries, like those in which we are now engaged, that have the establishment of general principles for their object, should be founded on periods of average duration; and whenever such is the case, we may always, without occasioning any material error, assume that the wages earned in different employments are, all things taken into account, about equal.

It may farther be observed, in reference to these principles, that wherever industry is unfettered, and knowledge generally diffused, the talents of all are turned to the best account. Indeed, it may be safely affirmed, that of the myriads of individuals engaged in industrious undertakings in Great Britain, as conductors, overseers, or workmen, the situation occupied by each is, in the vast majority of cases, that which is best suited to his capacity, and his salary or wages such as he is fairly entitled to by his services. Agriculturists, manufacturers, and merchants, whether their businesses be large or small, are always most anxious to give the greatest efficacy to their establishments, to adapt their means properly to their ends, and to select the parties that are, all things considered, the most suitable for their purposes. The prosperity of all industrious undertakings principally depends on the skill with which this selection is made, on the proper parties being placed in the proper situations, and their wages adjusted according to their

merits and the confidence reposed in them. Mistakes in a matter of such primary importance as the proper distribution of the labour employed, in any considerable undertaking, would be so very fatal to its success, that we may be sure they will be carefully guarded against. The principle of *detur digniori* is the only one on which their managers can act with safety or advantage to themselves. And it is quite as much for the interest of the employed as of the employers that this distribution should be fairly made; for otherwise trickery, ignorance, and sloth, might carry off the rewards due to integrity, skill, and diligence. The society in which we live has its disadvantages and drawbacks; but, at all events, it must be said of masters and capitalists engaged in business, that they never willingly fail duly to appreciate and reward the superior talents and industry of the lower classes; and never suffer, or, if ever, only through error and for a moment, that the fund which should feed and support labour should be misemployed to support idleness. And yet there have been, and still are, persons, calling themselves social reformers and friends to the poor, who propose that this natural and admirable system should be subverted, and that the employment and the wages of every man should be determined by agents nominated by government for the purpose! We should show but little respect for our readers, were we to waste their time by exposing in detail the palpable quackery of such a scheme. The innumerable abuses to which it would infallibly lead, were any attempt made to act upon it, would be such that it could not be maintained for six weeks. If it were, it would destroy industry, and fill the land with bankruptcy and beggary.

CHAPTER VI.

Hiring by Time and by Piece Work.—Advantages of the latter.—Inexpediency of making Wages depend on the Result of Undertakings.

Wages are sometimes paid by the day, week, month, year, or other term, and sometimes by the piece or job, that is, by the quantity of work done. Domestic servants are usually hired in the former mode, or by time; but large amounts of manufacturing, agricultural, and other labour are performed by the piece, and wherever it can be adopted, this is the preferable mode of hiring work-people. Their strength, skill, and assiduity are widely different. And when they are hired by time, it is often impracticable, and is always a difficult, troublesome, and invidious task to arrange them in classes, and adjust the wages of each according to their real deserts. Hiring by the piece or job does away with these difficulties; and, by exactly apportioning the reward to the amount of labour, not only takes away all temptation to idleness, but prompts workmen to put forth all their energies. It makes their own immediate interest, and not their duty to their employers, the mainspring of their exertions. Laborious and skilful workmen are no longer underpaid, as compared with those who are slothful and ignorant. The system admits of no partiality on the part of the masters, and of no pretence or shirking on the part of the employed. It is thoroughly honest and equitable. The wages earned under it may be low or high; but whatever may be their amount, they are distributed in the exact ratio of the services that have been performed. The labourer who executes twice the work that is executed by another, receives double wages, and so in proportion.

The stimulus which this plan of hiring gives to exertion, is so very powerful, that in some cases it has been thought ne-

cessary, in the view of preventing the labourers from overworking themselves, to limit the sums which they could earn in a given time. But this ultra zeal is not manifested, except in the case of parties engaged for a short period only, or when they first begin to work under the system. Regular task-work labourers, though distinguished by their industry and perseverance, do not overwork themselves. They are, also, much more their own masters than those engaged for certain terms. They are, in truth, contractors as well as labourers. And provided they execute their work within the term stipulated (if such stipulation be made), they may choose their own time for working, and begin and leave off when they please.

Piece work is also by far the most likely, if it be not the only means by which the mere labourer can expect to advance himself to a higher station. A man undertakes to cut down corn at so much an acre, to make roads and drains at so much a rood, to weave cloth at so much a yard, in short, to execute a certain amount of work for a certain price. Sometimes he restricts his undertaking to what he thinks he can execute himself, with perhaps the assistance of his family. But whether he do this, or employ others (sometimes in the way of sub-contractors) to assist him, it is his object to finish his task as expeditiously as possible, and to employ his profits as a means of extending his business. In this way he gradually rises in the scale of society, till, having ceased to work with his own hands, he becomes a contractor on a large scale, or engages in some other occupation. And it is plain that the training and experience he has had, and the habits he has formed, must make him at once a vigilant and a discerning master. The foundations of thousands of middling, and of very many large fortunes, have been laid in the way now stated. It is, in truth, the broadest, the easiest, and the safest of the various channels by which diligent, sagacious, and frugal individuals emerge from poverty, and attain to respectability and opulence. Those who thus rise to distinction may be emphatically said to be the architects of

their own fortunes. They owe nothing to interest, to favour, or to any unworthy means. They stood originally on the same level with their fellow-workmen, and they owe their elevation to the judicious exercise of talents common to them all.

There cannot, therefore, as it appears to us, be any reasonable doubt that the introduction of the practice of piece-work, or of hiring by the job, has been, and that its further extension would be, a great advantage to all classes, but especially to the labourers. It appears to be the only plan by which a man's earnings are not only made to depend upon, but are exactly proportioned to his labour, skill, and ingenuity; while it has the further advantage of enabling prudent and enterprising individuals to advance themselves, by comparatively easy steps, to a superior condition, and, in the end, to merge the character of labourer in that of employer.

It has sometimes been said, that it would be good policy to endeavour to interest labourers in the zealous prosecution of the task in which they may be engaged, by making their wages depend, in part at least, on the result of their exertions. But except in a few limited and peculiar cases, this could not be done. The wages of sailors may be, and indeed usually are, made to depend on the successful termination of the voyage. But how could the wages of the work-people employed on a farm, in a foundry, or in a cotton-mill, be made to depend on the result of such speculative undertakings? Very frequently, however, the workpeople now referred to, are paid by the piece; and, when such is the case, they have a plain and tangible motive, level to their capacities, and not depending on anything remote or contingent, to make every exertion.

But, though the practical difficulties in the way of making the wages of labourers dependent on the results of the employments in which they are engaged, were less formidable than they appear to be, we should not, in the great majority of cases, anticipate any advantages from the scheme being

adopted. On the contrary, the presumption is, that it would be injurious. If labourers are to participate in the advantages of successful enterprises, they must also participate in the losses resulting from those of a contrary description; and must, consequently, in cases of failure, be deprived of their accustomed and necessary means of subsistence. The hazard to which they would thus be exposed, might, it is true, be lessened by making a part only of their remuneration depend on the issue of the enterprise. But if it were really an advantage to be allowed to participate in a chance of this sort, the fixed portion of their wages would be proportionally diminished, and at every failure of an enterprise, the labourers engaged in it would be thrown upon the work-house, or on the contributions of the benevolent. It is nugatory to suppose that the condition of the poor should be improved by their engaging in such uncertain projects. Security, and a reward proportioned to their deserts, conduce most to their well-being. And these, we have seen, are enjoyed in the highest degree by the piece-work labourers. They are nowise dependent on the seasons, or on any one of the thousand unforeseen contingencies that may occur to defeat the most carefully conducted industrious speculation. They depend on themselves only; and being sure of a commensurate return, they invariably put forth all their energies.

It is further obvious that if work-people are to be interested in the result of an undertaking, they must have some control over its conduct, and be authorized to inquire into the accounts and proceedings of those by whom the undertaking is managed. All the advantages of individual enterprise and responsibility would, in consequence, be lost, and the most necessary and judicious steps, in the conduct of a business, might be objected to or censured by those most incompetent to form a judgment upon such matters. At present, when a capitalist engages in any undertaking, he knows beforehand that he will reap all the advantage if it be successful, and that, if otherwise, he will have to bear all the loss. He is consequently determined, by the most powerful

motives, to act discreetly, to proscribe all useless expense, and to avail himself of every means or incident that may present itself, to facilitate his projects. Except in a very few cases, all industrious undertakings are sure to be carried on most efficiently and economically by individuals. But of all sorts of interference, that of the workmen would be most objectionable. It would hardly, indeed, be more absurd for a general to take the opinion of the privates of his army on questions of strategy, than it would be for a capitalist to call his labourers to his councils, and mould them according to their opinions.

CHAPTER VII.

Law for repressing Combinations among Workmen repealed in 1824—Impolicy of that Law—Its real effect—Voluntary Combinations should not be forcibly suppressed—Such combinations are often injurious to the Workmen—Necessity for preventing one set of Workmen from obstructing others in their Employments.

Besides the causes of variations in the rate of wages, specified in Chapter V., they are supposed to be materially affected by the strikes and combinations which frequently exist among workmen; and as this is a subject of much importance, and with respect to which there is a considerable difference of opinion, we shall shortly examine it.

It was the practice of the legislature, subsequently to the reign of Edward I., to interfere respecting the stipulations in the contract of wages between masters and servants. And, its deliberations being in most cases guided by the advice of the masters, it was natural that it should interfere, rather to promote their particular interests, than that it might treat both parties with the same even-handed and impartial justice. But the gradual though slow dissemina-

tion of sounder and more enlarged principles of public economy having impressed all classes with a conviction of the general impolicy of such interference, it was latterly but rarely practised. The experience of nearly five hundred years has shown that, while every attempt to set a *maximum* on the price of labour is oppressive and injurious to the workmen, it is of no real advantage to their employers; for it has been found that workmen have invariably become more persevering, sober, and industrious, according as their freedom has been extended, and as they have been relieved from the vexatious restraints to which they were formerly subjected.

But though the legislature had long ceased to dictate the precise terms on which masters should buy and workmen sell their labour, a set of laws were of late much extended, and were very frequently acted upon, by which workmen were severely punished for *combining* together to raise their wages, or to oppose their reduction. These laws, which were in no ordinary degree partial and unjust, had their origin in a dark and barbarous period. The dreadful plague that desolated England, in common with most other countries of Europe, in 1348 and 1349, having destroyed great numbers of the labouring poor, a greater competition took place for the services of those who survived, who, in consequence, obtained much higher wages.[1] Parliament, however, instead of leaving this temporary rise of wages, to which the poor had an unquestionable right, to be modified by the increase of population it would have occasioned, passed, in 1350, the famous act (25 Edward III., c. 1) for regulating wages. By this statute, labourers were obliged to serve for such wages as were common in the districts in which they resided previously to the pestilence. But, as this gave rise to a great deal of cavilling, a statute was passed two years after, fixing the specific amount of the wages to be given to reapers, mowers, haymakers, thrashers, &c., and to the more common and important classes of artificers.[2] A variety of subsequent

[1] See *ante*, p. 21.
[2] See the Rates in Sir F. M. Eden's State of the Poor, vol. i. p. 33.

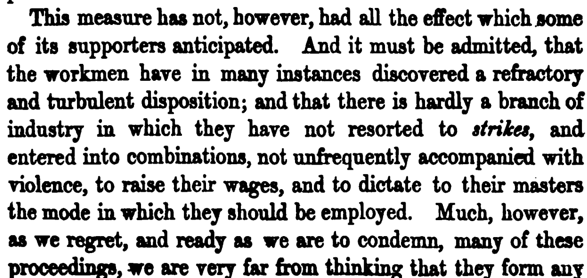
acts were passed, to enforce compliance with the regulations in the statute of wages, of the spirit of which some idea may be formed from the fact of its having been made *felony*, by a statute, passed in 1425 (3 Henry VI., c. 1), for masons to confederate or combine together to raise their wages above the statutory rate. And though this barbarous law has long ceased to be acted upon, it was not effaced from the Statute-book till 1824, and may be considered as the parent stock from which the statute against combinations was derived.

This statute (39th and 40th Geo. III., cap. 105), after declaring all combinations to obtain an advance of wages to be unlawful, went on to enact, that any workman who entered into a combination, either verbal or in writing, to obtain an advance of wages, to lessen the hours or time of working, to decrease the quantity of work, to persuade, intimidate, or by money or otherwise, endeavour to prevail on any other workman not to accept employment; or who should, for the purpose of obtaining an advance of wages, endeavour to intimidate or prevail on any person to leave his employment, or to prevent any person employing him: or who, being hired, should, without any just or reasonable cause, refuse to work with any other workman; such workman should, on the oath or oaths of one or more credible witnesses, before any two justices of the peace, within three calendar months after the offence had been committed, be committed to, and confined in, the common gaol within their jurisdiction, for any time not exceeding three calendar months; or, at the discretion of such justices, should be committed to some house of correction, within the same jurisdiction, there to remain, and be kept at hard labour, for any time not exceeding two calendar months.

The extreme severity of this enactment must strike every one. Justices of the peace belong to the order of masters; and, however respectable individually, they generally possess a full share of their peculiar feelings and prejudices. To invest two of them with the power of imprisoning workmen

for three months without the intervention of a jury, was certainly intrusting them with an authority very liable to be abused, and which, if it were to be exercised at all, should have been placed in hands less likely to act under a bias. The workmen could, it is true, appeal to the quarter sessions: but as this was only an appeal from one set of justices to another, it was of little importance. There were a variety of other clauses, discharging all workmen from attending any meeting for the purpose of combining, from contributing to defray the expenses incurred by persons acting contrary to this Act, and compelling offenders to give evidence, &c. &c., under the above-mentioned penalties.

A very strong feeling had been spreading for many years, not only among the workmen, but also among the more intelligent portion of the masters, that the attempts to enforce the provisions of the Combination Act had done more harm than good. And in unison with this feeling, a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed, in 1824, to inquire into the operation of the laws for preventing combinations among workmen, and for preventing their emigration, and the exportation of machinery. This committee collected a great deal of evidence on these subjects. And the impression made by this evidence, and the growing conviction of the impolicy of the combination laws were such, that a bill for their repeal, introduced by Mr. Hume, the chairman of the committee, was soon after carried through both Houses, and passed into a law.



This measure has not, however, had all the effect which some of its supporters anticipated. And it must be admitted, that the workmen have in many instances discovered a refractory and turbulent disposition; and that there is hardly a branch of industry in which they have not resorted to *strikes*, and entered into combinations, not unfrequently accompanied with violence, to raise their wages, and to dictate to their masters the mode in which they should be employed. Much, however, as we regret, and ready as we are to condemn, many of these proceedings, we are very far from thinking that they form any

valid reason either for the revival of the Combination Act, or for the enactment of any similar statute.

Nothing can apparently be more reasonable than that workmen should be allowed freely to combine or associate together, for the purpose of adjusting the terms on which they will sell their labour. Wages, like everything else, should always be left to be regulated by the fair and free competition of the parties in the market, without being interfered with by the legislature. "The property," says Adam Smith, "which every man has in his own labour, as it is the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable. The patrimony of a poor man lies in the strength and dexterity of his hands; and to hinder him fron employing this strength and dexterity in what manner he thinks proper, without injury to his neighbours, is a plain violation of the most sacred property." But it is false to affirm that workmen are allowed to dispose of their labour in any way they please, if they be prevented from concerting with each other the terms on which they will sell it. Capacity to labour is to the poor what stock is to the capitalists. Now a hundred or a thousand capitalists may form themselves into a company, or combination, take all their measures in common, and dispose of their property as they may, in their collective capacity, judge most advantageous for their interests:—And why should not a hundred or a thousand labourers be allowed to do the same by their stock? Of all the species of property which a man can possess, the faculties of his mind and the powers of his body are most particularly his own. And to fetter him in the mode in which he is to exercise or dispose of these faculties and powers, is a manifest encroachment on the most inviolable of all rights, and can be justified only by an overwhelming necessity.

It is easy, however, to show that, in point of fact, no such necessity ever did or can exist. The wages of any set of workmen who enter into a combination for the purpose of raising them, must be either—*1st*, below the natural and

proper rate of wages in the branch of industry to which they belong; or, *2nd*, they must be coincident with that rate, or above it. Now, it is clear that, in the first case, or when wages are depressed below their natural level, the claim of the workmen for an advance is fair and reasonable: and it would obviously be unjust and oppressive to prevent them from adopting any measure, not injurious to the rights of others, which they may think best fitted to render their claim effectual. But a voluntary combination among workmen is certainly in no respect injurious to any right of their masters. It is a contradiction to pretend that masters have any right or title to the services of free workmen in the event of the latter not choosing to accept the price offered them for their labour. And as the existence of a combination to procure a rise of wages shows that they have not so chosen, and is a proof of the want of all concord and agreement between the parties, so it is also a proof that the workmen are fairly entitled to enter into it; and that, however injurious their proceedings may be to themselves, they do not encroach on the privileges or rights of others. Not only, therefore, is a voluntary combination, unaccompanied by violence, a fair exercise of the right of judging for themselves on the part of workmen, but when it is entered into for the purpose of raising wages that are unduly depressed, its object is proper and desirable. Few masters willingly consent to raise wages; and the claim of one or of a few individuals for an advance of wages is likely to be disregarded so long as their fellows continue to work at the old rates. It is only when the whole, or the greater part, of the workmen belonging to a particular master or department of industry combine together, or when they act in that simultaneous manner which is equivalent to a combination, and refuse to continue to work without receiving an increase of wages, that it becomes the immediate interest of the masters to comply with their demand. And hence it is obvious, that without the existence either of an open and avowed, or of a tacit and real combination, workmen would not be able to obtain a rise of wages by their own

exertions, but would be left to depend on the competition of their masters.

It is, however, abundantly certain that this competition will always raise wages that have been unduly depressed. And it was from not adverting to this fact, that the influence of the combination laws in depressing wages was so very greatly exaggerated. When the wages paid to the labourers in a particular employment are improperly reduced, the capitalists who carry it on obviously gain the whole amount of this reduction, over and above the common and ordinary rate of profit obtained by the capitalists who carry on other employments. But a discrepancy of this kind could not be of long continuance. Additional capital would immediately begin to be attracted to the department where wages were low and profits high; and its owners would be obliged, in order to obtain labourers, to offer them higher wages. It is clear, therefore, that if wages be unduly reduced in any branch of industry, they will be raised to their proper level, without any effort on the part of the workmen, by the competition of the capitalists. And looking generally to the whole of the employments carried on in the country, we do not believe that the combination laws had any sensible influence over the average and usual rate of wages. That they occasionally kept them at a lower rate in some very confined businesses than they would otherwise have sunk to, may be true; though for that very reason they must have equally elevated them in others. This, however, is no good reason why the workmen engaged in employments in which wages happen from any cause to be unduly depressed, should be interdicted from adopting the only means in their power of doing themselves justice. When they are allowed freely to combine, their combination may occasion an immediate rise of wages; but when their combination is prevented, more or less time must always elapse before the high profits caused by the undue reduction of wages become generally known, and consequently before capital can be attracted from other businesses. And hence it is clear, that

every attempt to prevent combination in such cases as this, is neither more nor less than an attempt to hinder workmen from making use of the only means by which their wages can be speedily and effectually raised to their *just level.* It is committing injustice in behalf of the strong, at the expense of the weaker party.

We admit that the object of the second class of voluntary combinations, or of those which take place when the wages of the combining workmen are already equal to or above their natural and proper rate, is improper and unreasonable. Still, however, it is easy to see, that there is no more cause for the interference of the legislature in their case, than in the former. There is no good reason why workmen should not, like the possessors of every other valuable and desirable article, be allowed to set whatever price they please upon the labour they have to dispose of. If they combine to raise wages beyond their natural limits, or to enforce vexatious or improper conditions in regard to their employment, it is all but certain that their combination will be unsuccessful. It may be taken for granted, that the masters will resist any really improper demand; and the slightest glance at the relative condition of the parties must satisfy every one that, supposing them to be in earnest in their opposition, they can hardly fail to succeed in defeating it. The workmen always suffer more from a *strike* than the masters. It is indeed true, as Adam Smith has observed, that in the long run, they are as necessary to their masters as their masters are to them. But this necessity is far from being so immediate. The stock and credit of the master are in almost every instance much greater than the stock and credit of his labourers; and he is, therefore, able to maintain himself for a much longer time without their labour, than they can maintain themselves without his wages. In old-settled and fully-peopled countries, wages are seldom so high as to enable labourers to accumulate any considerable stock; and though the scanty funds of those engaged in strikes are frequently

eked out by contributions from the work-people in other businesses, and in other parts of the kingdom, the combination never fails, provided the masters do not give way, to break to pieces.

It is also evident, that when workmen enter into a combination to enforce an unreasonable demand, or to raise wages that are already up to the common level, they can gain nothing, but must lose by entering into other employments to which they have not been bred; while it is equally evident that a small extra sum will be sufficient to entice other labourers to the business they have left. All the great departments of industry have so many closely allied branches, that a workman who is instructed in any of them, can, without much training or difficulty, apply himself to some of the others. And thus the workmen who enter into the combination, will not only fail of their object, and be obliged to return to their work, but, owing to the influx of other labourers into their business during the *strike*, they will probably be compelled to accept of a lower rate of wages than they previously enjoyed.

Many extensive combinations have been broken up by the masters acting on this principle, or by their bringing workpeople from other districts, or other businesses, to supply the place of those in the combination. At first, these workpeople may not be so skilful or expert as those who have seceded; but these deficiencies soon become insensible, and are more than compensated by the greater command the masters have over the new hands, who, it is commonly stipulated, shall not enter into any union or association with other workmen for the purpose of raising wages, regulating the hours of work, &c.

The combination of the coal miners of the north in 1844, when about 40,000 hands struck for a modification of the conditions under which they had previously been employed and an advance of wages, though one of the most formidable that has hitherto existed, was defeated in the way now mentioned. It was carefuly organized, and had, when it began operations, a reserve fund of about £24,000, besides receiving subscriptions from trades'-unions in most parts of the country.

But the coal-owners determined not to give way, and made every exertion to bring miners and other labourers from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, to supply the place of those who had seceded. The result justified the wisdom of their determination; for the turn-outs, after an obstinate strike of from four to five months' duration, in which they exhausted every resource, and suffered the greatest privations, were compelled to abandon every one of their pretensions, and to beg to be allowed to resume their employment, under the same regulations as formerly, at their old, and in some cases even at lower wages. And this, with but few exceptions, is the ordinary result of the best organized combinations.

The substitution of machinery for manual labour, and its improvement, has done more perhaps than anything else to put down combinations in manufacturing employments. And though injurious to the work-people, combinations for an improper purpose are sometimes advantageous, by the stimulus they give to the improvement of machinery. In corroboration of this statement, it is only necessary to refer to the machines for wool-combing, mule-spinning, and others of the same kind, which were invented and introduced because of the capricious and unreasonable demands and proceedings of the wool-combers, cotton-spinners, &c. They have been completely successful; and have, in truth, not only rendered these employments comparatively independent of the whims and combinations of the work-people, but have materially improved and cheapened the products of the manufactures into which they have been introduced.

For these reasons, we think it is impossible that any one, who will calmly consider the subject, should resist coming to the conclusion, that a combination for an improper object, or to raise wages above their proper level, must cure itself, or that it must necessarily bring its own chastisement along with it. In some instances, strikes have been entered into from hostile feelings against obnoxious masters; and not unfrequently the workmen are seduced into them by the artful representations of agitators, in whom they place undeserved confidence, and,

who make them the means of advancing their own selfish ends, without caring for the misery they may entail on their dupes. But, in the majority of cases, a strike can hardly fail, under all ordinary circumstances, to be a subject of the most serious concern to workmen who have either forethought or experience. And the privations to which it unavoidably exposes them, form a strong presumption that they are honestly impressed with a conviction that the advance of wages claimed by them is moderate and reasonable, and that the strike has been forced upon them by the improper resistance of their masters. Even in those cases in which wages are notoriously depressed below their proper level, workmen will, if they consult their own interests, be shy about striking, and will resort to it only as a last resource. Such a proceeding instantly deprives them, and those that are dependent on their exertions, of their accustomed means of subsistence. In the event of their masters delaying, for any considerable period, to come to an accommodation, they are obliged, from inability, to support themselves, to depend for a while on the grudging and stinted contributions of others; and when this humiliating resource is exhausted, they must return to the business they have left, or else engage in employments to which they have not been bred, and which are not congenial to their habits. It is not, therefore, easy to suppose that workmen, when they become acquainted with the real effects of combinations, will rashly enter into them, and proceed to a strike, for the purpose of obtaining unreasonable or exorbitant wages. But if they should be at any time foolish enough to do so, their efforts will, no doubt, be ineffectual; and besides exposing themselves to great temporary hardship and distress, they will in the end have to accept the terms dictated by their masters.

But notwithstanding the dear-bought experience of their generally injurious influence, strikes and combinations to raise wages have seldom been so prevalent as in the past year, 1853. They seem to have originated in a variety of circumstances, partly and principally, perhaps, in the diminution of the

supply of labour, occasioned by the extraordinary emigration to Australia and the United States, and partly in the increase of the exports, and the exaggerated statements put forth in relation to the profits of the manufacturers. There can, indeed, be no doubt that these circumstances warranted an increase of wages; and they have, in truth, been materially increased during the last three or four years. But we need not be surprised that this increase has not satisfied the excited expectations of the workpeople, and that they have entered, in various places, into strikes and combinations to force up wages to a still higher elevation. The probability, however, seems to be that they will be unsuccessful. But however the struggle may terminate, it is doubtful, despite the heavy losses and privations the workmen have entailed upon themselves, whether their proceedings will be generally injurious to the masters. Consentaneously with the Preston strike, which has involved the cessation from work of several thousand hands, a stagnation began to take place in several departments of the cotton trade; and the manufacturers, supposing the strike had not occurred, would have been obliged to diminish the rate of production, either by working at short hours, or by shutting up some of their works. And hence the strike, though injurious to the particular masters whose workmen have entirely withdrawn from their employment, has been in the mean time advantageous to the others. It has removed some of their competitors from the field; and has effected that reduction in the supply of goods which, otherwise, could only have been brought about by a general agreement among the manufacturers.

When, therefore, the work-people employed in the cotton, woollen, or other departments of industry, in any particular town or district, combine to force up wages or reduce the hours of work, they should recollect that they are not the only persons engaged in the employment. It is most likely carried on in many other places. And it is plain that nothing could be more advantageous to the employers in Manchester, than that their competitors in Preston, Oldham, &c., should be crippled, or that they should have the whole market to

themselves. And thus it is that the folly and obstinacy of the work-people in one part of the country, though injurious to their employers, and ruinous, perhaps, to themselves, may, notwithstanding, redound to the advantage of the employers in other quarters.

But suppose that a combination is not confined to a single district, that it is general, that it embraces all, or nearly all, the work-people employed in one or other of the great departments of industry: this is the most favourable position in which the work-people can be placed for carrying their point; and yet, if the advance of wages which they claim be one to which they are not fairly entitled, the extension of the combination will make it only the more disastrous to themselves. In cases of this sort, instead of the works in a particular district being shut, they are closed over the whole kingdom; so that our foreign competitors on the continent and America have the entire market to themselves, and are enriched, and their business extended, by the depression and infatuation of their rivals. This is a very serious consideration; and one which the work-people should never lose sight of.

The latter should also bear in mind, when they engage in strikes and combinations to force up wages, that capital is not bound to any peculiar locality. Manufactures have been driven, in more than one instance, from one part of this country to another, through the disorderly and turbulent conduct of the work-people. But the mischief may go farther than this. Strikes and combinations, on a great scale, like those at present existing, though they may not drive capital from the north to the south, or *vice versâ*, may very likely force it to another country. No doubt there is generally a considerable disinclination to employ capital abroad. But that disinclination has its limits, and may be overcome either by the temptation of greater profits, or by the desire to emancipate oneself from the dictation of work-people, or rather of the agitators by whom their proceedings are usually directed. The extent to which English capital is vested in the stocks, and in the railways, and other public works of the United States, France, and other foreign countries, shows that it is

by no means so difficult as is often supposed to overcome the reluctance to employ capital in foreign investments. And the more intimate the intercourse becomes among different nations, the more will this reluctance be diminished. These circumstances should not be forgotten by those who are contemplating strikes and combinations. It must not be imagined that this is the only country in which manufacturing industry may be successfully prosecuted. Many parts of Prussia, Saxony, Switzerland, and France, have extensive and flourishing manufactures. And we do not know anything half so likely to stimulate their industry, and to make their competition still more dangerous than at present, as the strikes and combinations so frequent in England. They not only paralyze the proceedings of our manufacturers, but they tempt them to become partners in foreign houses, to construct mills on the Rhine or the Seine, rather than on the Irwell or the Clyde, and to carry abroad their machinery and their best workmen. And we are sorry to have to say that these are not speculative or eventual circumstances. They are being realized at this very moment. Whoever may be the really blameable parties, the *felo de se* proceedings at present carried on, threaten to inflict the same sort of injury on the trade and manufactures of the United Kingdom that the bigotry of Louis XIV. inflicted on those of France.

It appears from the authentic statements published by Messrs. Du Fay and Co., of Manchester,[1] than whom there are no higher authorities on such subjects, that the demand for raw cotton in 1853, has increased 7½ per cent. in Germany, Russia, and Holland, while it has fallen off 1½ per cent. in Great Britain. This startling fact is accounted for as follows, by the gentlemen referred to:—

"The decreased consumption of cotton in this country has been caused by strikes for higher wages, at a time when the general state of trade and other circumstances did not warrant the advance. But whilst the consumption of cotton has decreased here, it has increased in America and other countries,

[1] Circular, 1st February, 1854.

and will, we can assure our friends, still further increase, if the turn-outs do not speedily cease. It has, perhaps, never been sufficiently considered by the industrious classes of this and neighbouring districts, that they are raising a competition to the masters and to themselves elsewhere, by persisting in the dangerous course which they now pursue. The capacity for production in different parts of the world, at competing prices, is very nicely balanced; and this country possesses now very few advantages over rival manufacturing countries. If an article is for any length of time neglected here, or not produced in sufficient quantities, it will be manufactured in other countries; and a trade once transferred is not easily recovered. This view of the disadvantages of the present strikes and labour question has not, as far as we are aware, been brought home to those most interested in it; we should, indeed, be glad to have it in our power to convince both masters and men of the importance of considering the subject in this light, in order to bring their disputes to a speedy end, and thus to prevent serious injuries to the entire trade of this country."

This is the worst view that can be taken of the influence of strikes and combinations; and the desire to obviate it would, if anything could, warrant the interference of government for their suppression. But the grand principle of the freedom of industry must not be infringed upon. We must take it with its disadvantages as well as its advantages; and trust, as we may safely do, to experience, and the good sense and better training of the masters and work-people, to lessen the former and to increase the latter. Even if it were conceded that it might be expedient for government to interfere to put down a combination to raise wages above their proper level, or to frame improper regulations in regard to the employment of work-people, the concession would be of no real value to the apologists of combination laws; for the result of the combination is, in fact, the only certain test by which we can pronounce whether the advance of wages claimed by the workmen and the regulations proposed by them were fair and reasonable or the reverse. If

government were to refer to the masters for information on the subject, they would most likely be told that the best founded claim for a rise of wages was unjust and ill-founded; and if, on the other hand, they were to refer to the workmen, who have as good a right to be consulted as the others, the most exorbitant and unreasonable demand would be said to be moderate and proper, and such as could not be equitably refused. It is only by the fair and free competition of the parties in the market, that we discover which of these opposite and contradictory assertions is most consistent with truth. There neither are, nor is it in the nature of things that there can be, any other means of coming to a correct conclusion on the subject. If the workmen be in the right, they will, as they ought, succeed in their object: if they be wrong, they will be defeated, and the injury they will do to themselves will render them more cautious about again embarking in a similar struggle. Enlighten all parties as much as you possibly can with regard to the condition of the labouring classes, the rate of wages, and the state of industry here and elsewhere; but when this has been done you had better stop. The interference of government in the decision of questions between masters and their work-people can be productive only of evil. Having no means of informing themselves of the real merits of the case, its agents must, if they act at all, necessarily act blindly and capriciously. And even if they had such information, it would be unadvisable for them to interfere, it being abundantly certain that every combination for an improper object will be more easily and effectually put down without their assistance than with it.

The great evil of the combination laws consisted, as already observed, in the mistaken notions respecting their influence which they generated in the minds both of workmen and masters. They taught them to believe that there was one measure of justice for the rich, and another for the poor. They consequently set the interests and the feelings of these two great classes in direct opposition to each other, and did more to en-

gender hatred between the different orders of society—to render the masters despotic and capricious, and the workmen idle and turbulent, than can easily be conceived or imagined by those not pretty intimately acquainted with the former state of society in the manufacturing districts. Instead of putting down combinations, they rendered them universal, and gave them a dangerous character. For the fair and open, though frequently foolish and extravagant, proceedings of men endeavouring to advance themselves in society, and to sell their labour at the highest price, the combination laws gave us nocturnal meetings, private cabals, and oaths of secresy. There was not a workman to be found who did not consider it a bounden duty to embrace every opportunity of acting in the teeth of their most positive enactments. And all the means which the intelligence, the cunning, and the privations of workmen could suggest, for defeating and thwarting their operation, were resorted to from a conviction of their partiality and unfairness.

It appears, therefore, on every ground both of justice and expediency, that the repeal of the combination laws was a wise and salutary measure. Until that event, the terms of the contract between masters and workmen could not be said to be adjusted, as it always ought to be, on the principle of free and unrestrained competition. We readily allow that combinations of workmen and of masters may be, and, indeed, frequently are, formed for the accomplishment of improper objects. But it is quite clear that these combinations will, when let alone, inevitably cure themselves, and that the efforts of government to suppress them, besides being uncalled for and unnecessary, would be oppressive and unjust. Every individual who is not a slave is entitled to demand any price for his labour that he thinks proper. And if one individual may do this, may not fifty, or five thousand, demand the *same* price? A criminal act cannot be generated by the mere multiplication of acts that are perfectly innocent. We are not to confound the power and the right to set a price on labour with the reasonableness of that price. It is the business of those

who buy labour, and not of government, to decide whether the price set on it is reasonable or not. If they think it is unreasonable they may, and they certainly will, refuse to buy it, or to hire the workmen; and as the latter cannot long subsist without employment, necessity will oblige them to moderate their demands.

It will be observed, that the observations we have now made apply exclusively to the justice and policy of attempting to prevent *voluntary* combinations among workmen; and we trust they will not be understood as being intended to countenance, in the slightest degree, the atttempts that have frequently been made by combined workmen forcibly to prevent others from working, except on the conditions they have fixed for the guidance of their own conduct. Every such attempt is an obvious breach of the peace; and if not repressed by prompt and suitable punishment, would be subversive not only of the freedom of industry, but of the national welfare. The reason that combinations among numerous bodies are rarely injurious is, that the motives which individuals have to break off from the combination are so numerous and powerful, that it can seldom be maintained for any considerable period. But if those who adhere to the combination were to be allowed to maltreat and obstruct those who secede from it, this principle would be subverted, and the combination might become so very injurious as to require the interference of the legislature for its suppression. This, therefore, does not really seem to be a case in which there is much room for doubt or difference of opinion. It is plain, that we must either reduce the workmen to a servile condition, or authorize them to refuse to work, or sell their labour, except under such conditions as they may choose to specify. But when they are allowed this much, they are allowed *all* they are entitled to; and if they go one step further—if they attempt to carry their point by violence, either towards their masters or their fellow-workmen, they are guilty of an offence that strikes at the foundations of the manufacturing and commercial prosperity of the

country, and which no government can or ought to tolerate. It is indispensable that that system of intimidation which the workmen in some places have endeavoured to organize should, at all hazards, be effectually put down. And to secure this object, every practicable means should be adopted for facilitating the prosecution, speedy conviction, and punishment of those who are guilty of obstructing and intimidating others.

These remarks proceed from no unfriendly feeling towards the workmen, but from a desire to do them service. It is the extreme of folly to suppose that any combination can maintain wages at an artificial elevation. It is not, as we have already shown, on the dangerous and generally ruinous resource of combination, but on the forethought, industry, and frugality of work-people, that their wages, and their condition as individuals, must always depend. If they attempt, by adding violence to combinations, to force wages up to an artificial level, one of two things will follow; they will either draw down on themselves the vengeance of the law, or they will bring about their permanent degradation by forcing the transfer of that capital, from which alone they derive their subsistence, to other businesses, or to countries where it will be better protected.

CHAPTER VIII.

Interests of the Labourers promoted, and their condition improved, by increased facilities of Production and Exchange.—Circumstances which have conspired to prevent the Inventions and Discoveries of the last half-century from effecting a greater change for the better in the condition of the Labourers.—Influence of Taxation.

Though the labourers engaged in a particular trade may occasionally suffer from the introduction into it of new or improved machinery, or of new or cheaper methods of production, such suffering is but of brief duration, while the entire labour-

ing class is sure to be benefited by the change. This has been demonstrated over and over again, and is a proposition of the truth of which no doubt is now entertained. An increased facility of production immediately increases the command of all classes over necessaries and conveniences; and it further leads, by increasing the demand for the articles whose cost has been reduced, to an increased demand for labour. When the cost of cottons was reduced by the introduction of the spinning-frame, it is plain, as that reduction did not affect the demand for labour, or the rate of wages in other employments, that the condition of the labourers generally must have been improved by their being able to supply themselves with cheaper cottons. The fall in the price of the latter was, in truth, equivalent to a corresponding rise of wages; while the increased demand for cottons, and the powerful stimulus which was thereby given to invention and discovery, by still further lowering their price, and bringing them within the command of a constantly increasing number of consumers, has so much increased their consumption that the cotton trade is now, next to agriculture, the most important business carried on in the kingdom, employing millions upon millions of capital, and hundreds of thousands of work-people! And such is invariably the case, in a greater or less degree, with every increased facility of production. An increase of supply is sure to occasion an equal increase of demand. In this case, therefore, as in all others, the interests of the manufacturers and employers of labour are coincident with those of the labourers. Every additional facility of production really raises wages, or, which is the same thing, it gives the labourers a greater quantity of produce in return for the same amount of labour or of money.

Plain bobbin-net lace is said to have sold, in 1813 and 1814, for about 21s. a square yard; and the same article, but of an improved quality, may now be had for about 3d. the square yard! Hence, as compared with bobbin-net, wages are now about eighty-four times higher than in 1813-14.[1] And the

[1] This takes for granted that money wages have not fallen in the interval, which they have not done.

number of hands employed in the manufacture of the article has increased at least a hundred-fold in the interval.

The employment of machinery, and the increased facility of production consequent thereon, has also a tendency to raise the condition of the labourer, by bringing the powers of his mind more into action. Some of the most laborious operations of industry—such, for instance, as the thrashing out of corn—are now either wholly or principally performed by machinery, the task of the labourer being confined to its construction (in which he is usually assisted by other machines) and guidance. And the presumption is, that this substitution of the powers of nature for those of man will be carried to a much further extent, and that he will be progressively still more and more employed in making new applications of their exhaustless energies.

The same results follow from the repeal of prohibitions on importation, and from the opening of new commercial channels, by which produce may be brought from abroad cheaper that it can be furnished at home. It is proper, however, in the view of preventing any sudden shock being given to any great branch of native industry, that such changes should be cautiously introduced, and be accompanied with the necessary safeguards. But, apart from the temporary injury that it may occasion to a particular class, every additional facility given to commerce, like the additional facilities given to production, never fails to add to the well-being of the public. Owing partly to improvements in agriculture, and partly to greater facilities of importation, the price of corn was not, during the four or five years ending with 1852, more than half its price previously to the termination of the late war; so that, as compared with this most indispensable of all articles, wages may be said to have more than doubled since 1815. There is nothing, in truth, either isolated or in any degree peculiar in the situation of work-people. On the contrary, their interests are inseparably associated with, and promoted by, all that contributes to national opulence, civilization, and good government.

After what has now been stated, the reader will be prepared to hear that the condition of most classes of work-people has been much improved since the close of the American war, and that they are at present better fed, better clothed, and better lodged, than at any former period. We are aware that Lord John Russell is reported to have said, in 1844, that the labouring classes had retrograded within the last century, and that they were not then so well off as they had been in 1740. But, despite the deference justly due to so high an authority, we are satisfied that this is an erroneous statement. Most things on which wages are expended are as cheap now as in 1740, and very many—including all articles of clothing—are much cheaper. Notwithstanding the well-founded complaints of the badness of the lodgings of the lower classes, they are incomparably better now than they were in the last century, or at any anterior period. The older portions, indeed, in all our towns and villages, are precisely those in which the poor are in all respects the worst lodged. The bread, also, which is used in poor families in the present times is much superior, and in towns, at least, the consumption of butcher's meat by the labourers has greatly increased. Drunkenness and immorality, if they have not been materially abated, have not increased; while the manners of all classes have been humanized and softened. The great improvement that has taken place in the health and in the longevity of the population could not have been realized had not their condition been materially bettered.

At the same time, we are ready to admit that the condition of the labouring class is far from prosperous; and Lord John Russell was quite right in saying, that they do not appear to have profited as much as they should have done, or as much as the middle classes have done, by the extraordinary improvements that have taken place during the last half century, and especially by the fall in the price of most articles since 1815. The middle classes have, however, always evinced far more prudence and forethought than those below them, and

have, consequently, been the better able to avail themselves of the favourable circumstances referred to. There can, indeed, be no manner of doubt, that the peculiar poverty and distress which are always found to prevail, to a greater or less extent, among all sections of the labouring classes, must be unhesitatingly ascribed to their own vicious habits, improvidence, and want of industry. And yet it is true, that, however deficient in these respects, the work-people of the present day are less vicious and improvident, and more industrious than their predecessors of any former age; and this improvement in their conduct must have conspired, with the improvement in the arts and the greater facilities of production, to raise them in the scale of civilization.

But apart from the innumerable cases in which poverty and destitution may be traced to accidental circumstances, or to improvidence, misconduct, or want of industry on the part of individuals, still, as it appears to us, the average rate of wages is lower, and the condition of the best behaved labourers less comfortable than it might have been expected to be. And it is not probably very difficult to discover why this is the case; for, despite the favourable circumstances influencing the condition of the lower classes noticed above, others of a contrary character, and having also a powerful influence, have been at work for a lengthened period; and we are inclined to ascribe to the latter a good deal of what is most unfavourable in the present condition of the industrious and provident classes.

Of the circumstances now alluded to, the more important seem to be the influx of immigrants from Ireland, the greater dependence on the potato as an article of food, and the employment of children or young people in factories.

1. In some of the previous parts of this treatise, we have glanced at one or two of the circumstances, such as the dependence on the potato, the splitting of the land into minute fractions, and so on, that appear to have been most instrumental in filling Ireland with what is still probably a redundant, as it is an improvident and a degraded population.

But while their destitute condition has compelled the Irish poor to emigrate, their proximity to this country, our comparatively high wages, and the facility with which they get across the channel, have tempted them, especially since the introduction of steam navigation, to come and settle in vast numbers in England and Scotland. At present, from a fourth to a third part of the population of Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Paisley, and other great towns on the west side of Great Britain, consists of native Irish and their descendants. Even at Edinburgh, where there are no manufactures, the Irish constitute five-tenths of the lowest class, and nine-tenths of the paupers.[1] Few things, indeed, could have exercised so fatal an influence over the condition and prospects of the English and Scotch labourers as this immigration. Their forethought and industry have, in fact, tended rather to facilitate the invasion of this pauper horde than to improve their own condition. Their wages have been reduced by the competition of the famished serfs that have been cast upon our shores; and, which is still worse, their tastes and opinions in regard to what is necessary for their subsistence, have been lowered by the contaminating influence of example, and by familiar intercourse with those who are content to live in destitution and misery. If the character and condition of the Irish immigrants had been materially improved, it would have been some, though a most inadequate, compensation for the injury their invasion has done to the native population of Great Britain. Hitherto, however, this does not appear to be the case. The Irish immigrants, and their descendants, continue to occupy the lowest place in society, and deteriorate the British without advancing themselves. Had they belonged to a foreign country, their influx would long since have been either checked or prohibited. And it is not easy to see why a system, productive of little or no good to Ireland, and of much evil to Britain, should be permitted to continue. The late extraordinary emigration from Ireland to the United States has, however, gone far to

[1] Geographical Dictionary, *voce* Edinburgh.

check emigration to this country, and it may, perhaps, not be so great in future. But if it should again attain to anything like its extent in some late years, justice to our own people would seem to require that measures should be adopted to hinder England and Scotland from being overrun with the outpourings of this *officina pauperum*—or to prevent Ireland from dragging us down to the abyss of poverty and wretchedness in which she is sunk.

2. We have already endeavoured to exhibit the disastrous consequences resulting in Ireland from the general dependence of the population on the potato. Happily, the dependence on it has not been carried to anything like the same extent in any part of Great Britain; yet it has here been productive of similar though less calamitous results. Wherever it has become a principal part of the food of the working classes, as in Devonshire and Dorset, their wages are low, and their situation precarious. When the labourers principally subsist on wheat, or any other variety of corn, they may, by economizing in their consumption of bread, acquire a considerable additional supply of other things. But potatoes are so very cheap, that no economy in their use can enable those using them materially to increase their command over other articles. And when they fail, those depending on them are here, as in Ireland, reduced to the extremity of want.

The reader will not, therefore, be surprised to learn that we are not of the number of those who regret the check given to the potato culture by the late failures of the crop. On the contrary, we incline to think that their influence should have been strengthened by legislative measures; and that it would be sound policy to discourage the growth of a root which is otherwise almost sure to become a staple article of food, and which never fails to exercise a most pernicious influence over those dependent upon it. Were it used, along with bread, as a subsidiary article, it would be different. But it can hardly continue for any very considerable length of time to be so used; its greater cheapness, and the facility

with which it is made ready for use, tempting the poor to resort to it in preference to any other article. But this is a fatal proceeding on their part. After they have been accustomed to subsist on it, they become its slaves; for their wages being determined by its price, they cannot, how anxious soever, leave it for a better or more costly article. It is not easy to exaggerate the evils inseparable from such a state of things. We are persuaded, indeed, that the growing dependence on the potato has, not in Ireland only, but also in Britain and elsewhere, had a most injurious tendency; and that but for it the labouring classes would have profited to a much greater extent than they have done by the wonderful progress of industry and invention since 1815.

3. We are also disposed to think that the increased demand for juvenile labour, growing out of the rapid extension of the manufacturing system, has not a little injured the condition of the labouring classes. It made the manufacturing towns in so far resemble new colonies, that for a while a family became (and to some extent continues to be) a source of wealth to their parents rather than a burden; and those who could with difficulty have subsisted themselves and their families on their own earnings, were rendered comparatively comfortable through the earnings of their children. But this resource, though advantageous in the mean time, has proved in the long run to be injurious. For, by encouraging improvident unions, and weakening the principle of moral restraint, it contributed to increase population, and has probably taken from the wages of the adults as much as it has given to the children, or more. And in addition to this, it made young people be employed in factory labour at a premature age, before their physical powers were sufficiently developed, and before they had time to acquire any considerable amount of school education. Its effects upon the parents were still more unfavourable; for, by teaching them to depend to a considerable extent on the gains of their children, it made them less industrious, and generally also

less frugal and parsimonious than they would otherwise have been. We are, therefore, inclined to approve of the policy of the Act which limits the labour of young people in factories. It is right that the state should interfere to protect those who are unable to protect themselves. And in emancipating them from the slavery in which they were frequently involved through the selfish and vicious conduct of their parents, we are really contributing to improve the habits and condition of the latter.

It may probably be thought that, in referring to the causes which have impeded, and which continue to impede, the improvement of the labouring classes, the pressure of taxation is entitled to a prominent place. And if any considerable stress could be safely laid on the harangues of honourable gentlemen at public meetings, and even in the House of Commons, such would appear to be the case. Probably, however, these harangues are made rather in the view of conciliating popular favour than from a conviction of their truth. But whatever may be their motive and object, they tend to perpetuate a mischievous delusion, and are in great measure, if not wholly, unfounded. It is more than doubtful whether the condition of the labouring class would be sensibly improved, supposing it were possible, without upsetting good order and security, to sweep off every tax now existing in the United Kingdom. It might be somewhat improved by the repeal of the duty on tea—though now that it is being placed on a proper footing, its pressure will soon become but little perceptible, which is the case with the duty on sugar. But the repeal, or even reduction, of the duties on spirits, tobacco, and malt, would be decidedly injurious. These duties should be regarded as sumptuary penalties intended to check the indulgence in pernicious habits and wasteful expenditure. It is contradictory to imagine that it is possible to improve the condition of the labouring classes, by giving them increased facilities and greater temptations to plunge still deeper into that intemperance and dissipation which are their scourge and

ruin. We are not aware that it has occurred to the financial reformers of China to attempt to elevate the character and condition of their countrymen by cheapening opium and facilitating its consumption in the Celestial Empire. But we take leave to doubt whether such a policy would be more absurd than to attempt to improve the condition of our labourers by cheapening gin and tobacco.

It is needless, we presume, to dwell on the destructive influence of an intemperate indulgence in intoxicating drinks—on the poverty, the vice, and the wretchedness of which it is the fruitful source. The taste for tobacco, though in some respects less injurious than the taste for spirits, makes a much more serious inroad than is commonly supposed on the means of the poor. The duty on tobacco produced in 1852 a nett revenue of £4,580,741. And it is generally supposed that, after it has been partially manufactured into snuff and cigars, distributed over the country, and sold by retail, it costs at least double the duty, or £9,121,482. So that, allowing for smuggling and adulteration, the expenditure on this worthless stimulant may be safely taken at £10,000,000 a year, or thereby. And of this immense sum more than three-fourths is contributed by the working classes. So deeply rooted is the taste for tobacco, that in some country parishes in the south of Scotland the expenditure upon it equals or exceeds the expenditure upon tea. Under such circumstances, it would be the climax of folly to do anything to increase the demand for tobacco. A duty on it is quite unexceptionable, and should be fixed at the point, whatever it may be, that will produce the greatest amount of revenue.

The repeal or reduction of the taxes on the middle and upper classes would have no sensible effect in increasing the demand for labour. And supposing it had, it would be advantageous only to the industrious and provident labourers. Nothing, in truth, can be of any real service to the others. Those who spend Sunday and Monday in gin shops and skittle grounds, would not be much bettered by being able to spend Tuesday in the same way. Nothing, therefore, can be

a greater fallacy than to suppose that our existing system of taxation has any sensible influence in depressing the labourers. The protective duties that were formerly laid on corn and sugar had in some degree that effect. But since their repeal, the influence of our taxation has been very different; and the labouring class would not gain, but lose by its abolition.

Ireland is, and has always been, compared with its extent and fertility, one of the least heavily taxed countries in the world. And yet her population has been uniformly poor and miserable. This circumstance would of itself suffice to show that the condition of a people does not depend nearly so much on the taxes laid on them, as on their character and conduct —that is, on their habits, industry, and forethought.

CHAPTER IX.

Friendly Societies.—Savings Banks.—Advantages of these Institutions.

THE formation of benefit clubs, or friendly societies, seems to be one of the best devices for enabling the poor to provide for themselves, without depending on the charity of their more opulent neighbours. Friendly societies are formed on a principle of mutual insurance. Each member contributes a certain sum by weekly, monthly, or annual subscriptions, while he is in health; and receives from the society a certain pension or allowance when he is incapacitated for work by accident, sickness, or old age. Nothing, it is obvious, can be more unexceptionable than the principle of these associations. Owing to the general exemption from sickness until a comparative late period of life, if a number of individuals under thirty or thirty-five years of age, form themselves into a society, and subscribe each a small sum from their surplus earnings, they are able to secure a comfortable provision for

themselves, in the event of their becoming unfit for labour. Any single individual who should trust to his own unassisted efforts for support, would, it is plain, be placed in a very different situation from those who are members of such a society; for, however industrious and parsimonious, he might not be able to accomplish his object; inasmuch as the occurrence of any accident, or an obstinate fit of sickness, might, by throwing him out of employment, and forcing him to consume the savings he had accumulated against old age, reduce him to a state of indigence, and oblige him to become dependent on the bounty of others. Wherever a liability to any unfavourable contingency exists, the best and cheapest way of obviating its effects, is by uniting with others. It may, indeed, be said, that individuals who are members of friendly societies, and who have passed through life, as many of them have done, without having occasion to claim any portion of their funds, lose the whole amount of their subscriptions. But this is a most erroneous statement. The individuals in question have not, it is true, received any pecuniary compensation; but they have enjoyed what was of equal value—a feeling of security against want, and a consequent peace of mind and consciousness of independence. The vast majority of those who insure their property against fire, reap no advantage from it, except a feeling of being secured against a casualty to which all property is liable. This, however, is a sufficient motive to induce every considerate person to execute an insurance. And, on the same principle, all individuals not possessed of incomes derived from land or stock, but who depend for support on the wages of their labour, if they would place themselves in a state of security, and provide effectually against the risk of being reduced to pauperism and destitution, ought not to neglect to enroll themselves in friendly societies.

For these, and other reasons, which our limits will not permit us to state, we are glad to find that friendly societies have made so considerable a progress, that the number of members of *enrolled* societies, in England only, is at present (1854) estimated at about 900,000 individuals. This is a

satisfactory proof that the poor of England are animated by a strong spirit of independence; and that the adverse influences to which they have been exposed have not had so great an effect as might perhaps have been expected. It should also be recollected, that the progress of these societies has been much counteracted by the ignorance and mismanagement of their officers, and by the real difficulty of establishing them on a secure foundation. The great error has consisted in their fixing too large a scale of allowances. At their first institution they are composed of members in the prime of life; there is, therefore, comparatively little sickness and mortality amongst them. In consequence, their funds rapidly accumulate; and they are naturally tempted to give too large an allowance to those members who are occasionally incapacitated. But the circumstances under which the society is placed at an advanced period are materially different. Sickness and mortality are then comparatively prevalent. The contributions to the fund decline at the same time that the outgoings increase. And it has not unfrequently happened, that societies have become altogether bankrupt; and that the oldest members have been left, at the close of their life, destitute of all support from funds on which they had relied, and to which they had largely contributed.

But the errors in the constitution of friendly societies are not incurable; and various efforts, many of which have been productive of beneficial effects, have been made by private individuals and associations, and by the legislature, to obviate the chances of their failure, and to encourage their foundation on sound principles. Two Reports in 1825 and 1827, by a Committee of the House of Commons, on the Laws respecting Friendly Societies; the Report of the Highland Society on the same subject, and other publications, embody much valuable information with regard to these societies. There are, doubtless, several important points which still remain to be satisfactorily cleared up; but, in the mean time, enough has been done to enable government to assist in placing friendly societies on a secure foundation, and several

acts have been passed with that object. Such societies as think proper to claim the benefit of these acts are bound to submit a statement of their rules and regulations for the approval of the officer (Mr. Tidd Pratt) appointed for that purpose; and in the event of these being approved by him, and of the tables of payments and allowances appearing suitable to the justices, the society is confirmed by the latter, and becomes entitled to the privileges conferred by the acts referred to. These consist in being allowed to invest the funds of the society in government securities at a minimum rate of interest (£3 0s. 10d. per cent.), and in the funds of saving banks. But it is, of course, open to all individuals, not seeking any connexion with government, to establish friendly societies on any footing, and in any form, they may think proper.

Savings banks deserve also the warmest support of all who are friendly to the improvement and independence of the poor. The formation of a habit of saving is of vital importance; and to that two things are necessary—viz., first, the ability to save; and second, a safe and convenient place in which to deposit savings. Now, most persons, even in the lowest walks of life, have the first and most indispensable of these requisites. Wages are not determined by the wants, but by the numbers, the skill, and the ability of labourers; and, supposing the latter to be about equal, the labourer with a wife and family, and he that is unmarried, will each receive the same amount of wages. It consequently follows that the latter may, if he choose, save all, or nearly all, the sum which the other expends on his family. This is not a matter about which there can be any doubt. The fact of other labourers providing for the wants of two, three, or four persons out of the same wages that are paid to him, shows conclusively that he has the means of becoming, to a certain extent, independent, and of in so far securing himself against those contingencies to which every one is liable. If he neglect to profit by this golden opportunity, if he spend all his earnings on immediate gratifications, and make no

provision against adversity, he will be utterly destitute should he lose his employment, be attacked with sickness, or meet with an accident. And though he were fortunate enough to escape these evils, the respite is temporary only. When he becomes old and unfit for labour, "*poverty will come upon him as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man.*" And to avoid being starved, he will have to renounce the society and the freedom to which he has been accustomed, and consent to be immured and despised in a work-house.

But even where the means and the desire to save some portion of their earnings have co-existed, the want of a safe place of deposit for their savings, where they would yield a reasonable interest, and whence they might be drawn at pleasure, has formed a serious obstacle to the formation of a habit of accumulation among labourers. Public banks do not generally receive a less deposit than £10; and there are but few amongst the labouring classes who find themselves suddenly masters of so large a sum; "while, to accumulate so much by the weekly or monthly saving of a few shillings, appears at first view almost a hopeless task; and should an individual have the resolution to attempt it, the temptation to break in upon his little stock at every call of necessity might be too strong to resist. At all events, the progressive addition of interest is lost during the period of accumulation, and it even frequently happens that the chest of the servant or labourer is not safe from the depredations of the dishonest; while the very feeling of insecurity which such a circumstance inspires must operate as a fatal check to habits of saving."[1] A similar effect results from the instances that have often occurred, where those poor persons, who had in despite of every discouragement accumulated a little capital, have been tempted, by the offer of a high rate of interest, to lend it to persons of doubtful characters, whose bankruptcy has involved them in irremediable ruin. It is plain, therefore, that few things are likely to be of greater advantage, with

[1] Duncan on Parish Banks, p. 3.

a view to the formation of those new and improved habits which must necessarily result from the diffusion of a spirit of frugality and forethought among the poor, than the institution of savings banks, or places of safe, convenient, and advantageous deposit for their smallest savings. They no longer can plead the want of facility of investment, in excuse for their wasting what little they can save from their wages in gin shops, or other idle or injurious gratifications. They may now feel assured that their savings, if they carry them to a savings bank, and the interest accumulated upon them, will be faithfully preserved to meet their future wants. And those only who are so thoughtless or so degraded as to prefer idleness and dissipation to industry and economy, will decline availing themselves of whatever means of accumulation may be in their power. The habit once contracted of carrying their surplus earnings to the savings bank, they will find that it involves no privation, and that the consciousness of having improved their position and provided some security against unlooked-for evils, is in itself a high enjoyment.

It may be said, perhaps, that these statements apply rather to what savings banks should be than to what they are; and it must be confessed that instances have occurred in which these establishments have been grossly mismanaged, and the funds of the contributors been wasted and embezzled. Luckily, however, these instances bear but a small proportion to the entire number of savings banks. And it is to be hoped that means may be devised to prevent their recurrence, and to afford to the depositors that perfect security which is so desirable, and so essential to the completeness of the system.

The deposits in savings banks are very large, having amounted, in Great Britain, on the 20th Nov. 1850, to the immense sum of £31,208,322. But the practical value of the system must not, we are sorry to say, be measured by the magnitude of the deposits. Advantage has not, in truth, been taken of it to nearly the same extent by those work-people for whose use it was mainly intended, as by the classes im-

mediately above them. Tradesmen and farmers, and their families, and many individuals belonging to the middle classes, have not been slow to avail themselves of the advantages of savings banks; and they have been a good deal resorted to by domestic servants, especially by females. But ordinary labourers, and particularly those working by the day, have been seldom found, at least compared with those now referred to, carrying their surplus earnings to savings banks. This is much to be regretted; for they are the very class to which these institutions would be of the greatest service. Perhaps something might be done to overcome or lessen this culpable neglect of their own obvious interests on the part of work-people. A man who will not avail himself of the means in his power for securing himself against want, has but slender claims on the bounty of others. And it were well, perhaps, if the treatment of the poor applying for relief were made materially to depend on the extent to which they had availed themselves, when in health and in employment, of these and similar institutions.

It is unnecessary to engage in this place in any discussion with respect to the comparative merits of friendly societies and savings banks. Both are excellent, and well fitted to promote the advantage of the labouring classes. The promotion of habits of accumulation is but a secondary object in the formation of a friendly society; and though it certainly has that effect, it has it, generally speaking, in a less degree than a savings bank. Its grand object is to provide *a security against future want*—to guard against those accidents and casualties to which all are liable, and against which no individual efforts can ever afford an effectual protection. A savings bank is unquestionably also a most valuable institution; but it does not supersede the other. It does not give the poor man that security which is given him by his becoming a member of a well-constituted friendly insurance society. Nothing, therefore, can be more unreasonable and ill-founded than the hostility to friendly socie-

ties manifested by many patrons of savings banks. Both institutions are intended to promote the improvement of the poor, and to enable them to support themselves. And being equally well calculated to effect these desirable objects, it is, to say the least, not a little inconsequential and absurd for those who are the friends of the one to labour to misrepresent the other and to bring it into disrepute.

It would, however, be unjust not to mention, that though some of the patrons and supporters of savings banks are opposed to friendly societies, there are many amongst them who take a more correct and comprehensive view of the subject, and who are equally friendly to both. The advantages of friendly societies are nowhere better stated than in the tract, to which we have already referred, of the late Dr. Duncan, of Ruthwell, who was one of the first to promote the foundation of savings banks, and to whose philanthropy and intelligence these institutions have been largely indebted. "There is one point of view," says he, "in which the friendly society scheme can claim a decided advantage. An individual belonging to the labouring part of the community cannot expect, by making the most assiduous use of the provisions of a savings banks, to arrive at sudden independence; on the contrary, it is only by *many years* of industry and economy that the flattering prospects held out by that system can be realized. But health is precarious, and accident or disease may in a moment put an end to all the efforts of the most active and expert. It is under such circumstances that a very striking difference appears in favour of the friendly society scheme. He who should trust entirely to the progressive accumulation of his funds in a savings bank, might now find himself fatally disappointed. If he had not been fortunate enough to realize a considerable capital before the sources of his subsistence were dried up, the illness of a few weeks or months might reduce him to a state of want and dependence, and cause him to experience the unhappiness of mourning over impotent efforts and abortive hopes. On the other hand, the man who has used the precaution to

become a member of a friendly society has made a comfortable and permanent provision against the sudden attack of disease and accident. The moment he comes to acquire the privilege of a *free member*, which, by the rules of most of those institutions is at the end of the third year after he began to contribute, he is safe from absolute want, and the regular manner in which his weekly allowance is paid him enhances its value. Nor is this provision liable to any of those objections, which have been so strongly urged against the system of poor rates. Instead of degrading and vitiating the mind, its tendency is directly the reverse. The poor man feels that he is reaping the fruit of *his own* industry and forethought. He has purchased, by his own prudent care, an honourable resource against the most common misfortunes of life; and even when deprived of the power to labour for a livelihood, an honest pride of independence remains to elevate and ennoble his character."[1]

CHAPTER X.

Influence of the Poor-Laws over the Condition of the Labourers.

It would be foreign to the purposes of this treatise to enter into any lengthened inquiries in regard to the principles and practical operation of the poor-laws. They were instituted principally with a view to the advantage of the poor. But by providing a refuge and a support to the latter in periods of revulsion and distress, they powerfully contribute to maintain the public tranquillity, and consequently conduce to the prosperity of the other classes. Practically, however, their influence is of a mixed description, and is in part at least unfavourable. It would be easy to show that in countries

[1] An Essay on the Nature and Advantages of Parish Banks, 2nd Edition, p. 50.

like this, a compulsory provision for the maintenance of those who are unable to maintain themselves, is not only a most valuable, but an indispensable institution. Yet it is plain that such provision being independent of their own industry and thrift, will in some degree detract from that sense of self-reliance on which the well-being of every man must always mainly depend. And it is farther plain, that if you make the provision equal and indiscriminate—if you place the industrious and the lazy, the frugal and the thriftless, on the same footing, you can hardly fail to weaken some of the most powerful motives to good conduct in the virtuous part of the community, and to strengthen the vicious propensities in those that are bad. And hence it is, that much of the real effect of a compulsory provision for the poor depends on the mode in which it is administered. The law says that no man in England shall be allowed to suffer the extremity of want, and in so far it treats all classes alike. This equality does not, however, go for much. Her peculiar rewards still remain to industry. The labourer who has saved some little property by contributing to a savings bank or a friendly society, and who perhaps has acquired a cottage and garden, has nothing in common with a pauper. He is elevated by the consciousness that he has not neglected the opportunities afforded him of improving his condition; that he is not indebted for his subsistence to the grudging charity of others; and he enjoys a much larger share of comfort and respectability than those in higher situations will readily imagine. But those who have nothing but the poor-laws to fall back upon when their health fails, or they happen to be out of employment, are in a widely different situation. They are not left to die by the way-side, to be starved or frozen to death, and that is about all that is done for them. They are deprived of their liberty, shut up like felons in work-houses, and compelled to submit to the discipline and perform the tasks enforced in these establishments. Nothing, therefore, can be a greater error than to suppose that the labouring classes are placed, how different soever their characters and conduct,

through the operation of the poor-laws, nearly on the same level. And in point of fact, the poor have themselves the greatest interest in preventing any such equalization; for were it realized, good conduct, industry, and forethought would no longer enjoy that superiority to which they have an irresistible claim; and the external circumstances of the virtuous part of the community would be reduced to the low level of the vicious and the improvident. Imprisonment, hard labour, and inferior food are all that the law of England assigns to sloth, dissipation, and profligacy. And it is of the utmost importance that these vices should never fail to be accompanied with their proper punishment. To make work-houses comfortable, is to pervert them from their peculiar purpose. The more they are complained of, provided they be not unhealthy, the better. They should be places of refuge for the destitute, but with as little to recommend them as possible.

It is true that the best and most industrious individuals are subject to bad health—to all sorts of accidents, and that they may be compelled, without any fault of their own, to become claimants for public relief. And it may be asked, are these parties to be obliged to resort to work-houses, and to be subjected to the same treatment as the slothful and the disorderly? We answer, Certainly not. Such cannot be the case, unless the administration of the poor-laws be grossly defective. Industrious labourers, if overtaken by poverty, should, if practicable, be provided for at their own houses, or those of their relatives or friends. The work-house either is or should be appropriated to the use of a very different class, those whose destitution has been occasioned by their own misconduct, who are suspected of counterfeiting poverty, or whose laziness and disorderly habits prevent their being employed. "Sloth and improvidence dispose a man to live gratis (precariously) and ungratefully on the public stock, as an insignificant cypher, a sordid wretch, filching food out of the public granary, but yielding no compensation or benefit thereto." Persons of this description are the proper

s of work-houses. The really deserving poor should be sent to them, or, if ever, only in cases of emergency; hile there, a marked difference should be made in their ient. If work-houses be conducted on any other ple,—if they treat all who may be forced to resort to n the same manner, without any regard to their previous ter and conduct, they level in as far as possible all tion between virtue and vice; and they cannot do this it adding to the misery they profess to relieve, and be- g formidable engines of demoralization.

CHAPTER XI.

Education.

the means of providing for the permanent improve- of the poor hitherto suggested, few, if any, seem to pro- o be so effectual as the establishment of a really useful n of public education. Much of the misery and crime afflict and disgrace society have their sources in ignor- -in the ignorance of the poor with respect to the cir- ances which really determine their condition. Those ave laboured to promote their education seem, generally ing, to be satisfied, provided they succeed in making able to read and write. But the education which stops s point omits those parts that are really the most im- nt. A knowledge of the arts of reading, writing, and netic may, and indeed very often does, exist in company an all but entire ignorance of those principles with ct to which it is most for the interest of the poor them- s, as well as the other portions of the community, that hould be well informed. To render education productive the utility that may be derived from it, the poor should, dition to the elementary instruction now communicated em, be made acquainted with the duties enjoined by

religion and morality; and with the circumstances occasion that gradation of ranks and inequality of fo which are of the essence of society. And they sho impressed, from their earliest years, with a conviction important truth, which it has been the main object work to establish and illustrate, that they are in measure the arbiters of their own fortune—that what can do for them is but trifling compared with what th do for themselves—and that the most liberal governmen the best institutions, cannot shield them from povert misery, without the exercise of a reasonable degree o thought and good conduct on their part. It is a pro expression, that man is the creature of habit; and no tion can be good for much in which the peculiar and po influence of different habits and modes of acting ov happiness and comfort of individuals is not traced and bited in the clearest light, and which does not show how productive of advantage may be most easily acquire those having a contrary effect most easily guarded a The grand object in educating the lower classes should teach them to regulate their conduct with a view to well-being, whatever may be their employments. The sition of scientific information, or even of the arts of r or writing, though of the greatest importance, is subor and inferior to an acquaintance with the great art of " well;" that is, of living so as to secure the greatest a of comfort and respectability to individuals, under wh circumstances they may be placed. That the ultimate of an education of this sort would be most advanta there can be little doubt. Neither the errors nor the of the poor are incurable. They investigate the pra questions which affect their immediate interests wit greatest sagacity and penetration, and do not fail to their remote consequences. And if education were ma embrace objects of real utility—if it were made a mea instructing the poor with respect to the circumstances elevate and depress the rate of wages, and which improv

deteriorate their individual condition, the presumption is, that numbers would endeavour to profit by it. The harvest of good education may be late, but in the end it can hardly fail to be luxuriant. And it will amply reward the efforts of those who are not discouraged, in their attempts to make it embrace such objects as we have specified, by the difficulties they may expect to encounter at the commencement, and during the progress of their labours.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has excellently observed, in reference to the diffusion of education, that—"Of all obstacles to improvement, ignorance is the most formidable, because the only true secret of assisting the poor is to make them agents in bettering their own condition, and to supply them, not with a temporary stimulus, but with a permanent energy. As fast as the standard of intelligence is raised, the poor become more and more able to co-operate in any plan proposed for their advantage, more likely to listen to any reasonable suggestion, more able to understand, and therefore more willing to pursue it. Hence it follows, that when gross ignorance is once removed, and right principles are introduced, a great advantage has been already gained against squalid poverty. Many avenues to an improved condition are opened to one whose faculties are enlarged and exercised; he sees his interest more clearly, he pursues it more steadily, he does not study immediate gratification at the expense of bitter and late repentance, or mortgage the labour of his future life without an adequate return. Indigence, therefore, will rarely be found in company with good education."[1]

It is not to be expected, nor perhaps to be wished, that the mass of the people should be profoundly learned. The great works, in which new principles are developed, can neither be read nor understood by them. But the results of these works, and the truths which they contain, may be embodied in elementary treatises, may be taught in schools, and made to circulate in workshops and hamlets. This has been done with the physical and mathematical sciences; but it has not hitherto

[1] *Records of the Creation*, vol. ii. p. 298.